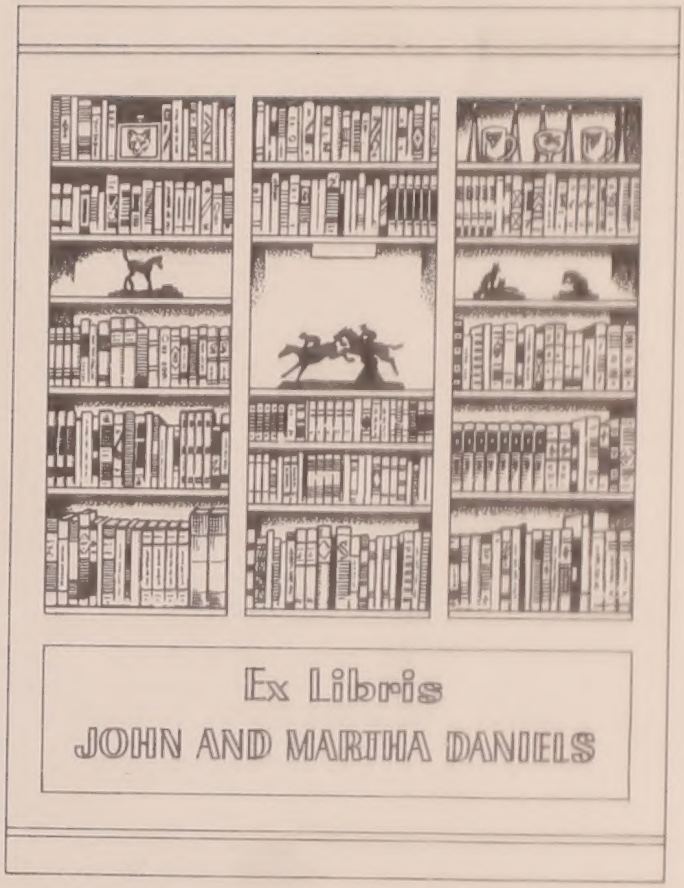
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Crusader

HORSE LOVERS

Addressed to those who are thrilled by the deep note of a hound, and rejoice in the feel of a good horse beneath them

BY

LT.-COL. GEOFFREY BROOKE

With Illustrations by
"Snaffles"

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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FOREWORD

My conscience tells me that an apology is due to my friend, Major Ardern Beaman, for sending him these chapters to read in the original, and thus taxing his good nature to the full. To him I owe a debt of gratitude for his able criticisms, sound advice and kindly help, without which these pages would never have seen the light of day. From a literary standpoint they represent neither fish, flesh nor fowl, nor even good red herring. A novel requires a plot; a romance betokens passion; a treatise elaborates a thesis; while memoirs presuppose facts dovetailed into fiction.

None of the above qualifications will be found in this narrative.

My reason further tells me that an excuse is due to my readers for the mental pabulum they will fail to derive from a perusal of this book.

Its conception is solely due to the fact that a friend recently wrote to say that he hoped, one day, to hear more of Mr. X. and his horse, a character that appeared in a previous production under the title of "Horse-sense and Horsemanship." Needless to say, Mr. X. was an imaginary personality, like all his friends whom the reader will meet in connection with the story of his horse. (Fortunately our artist has been kind enough to portray those individuals whom he considered worthy of the compliment he thus bestows upon them.)

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HORSE LOVERS

CHAPTER I

GEESE AND SWANS

Mr. X. was the son of Hercules Postlethwaite, Esq., who in turn christened his only child Xenophon. It was inevitable that young Xenophon should be known to his friends as X., and to his acquaintances as Mr. X.

At the time of our story, he was a man of about thirty or thereabouts, and old Hercules had made up for his eccentricity in nomenclature by leaving him a considerable fortune derived from a property in Australia.

Thus our friend, who had been brought up in England, found himself left well off as a bachelor, and being blessed with the wherewithal and the inclination to devote himself to the "sport o' kings," he soon became a well-known personality in fashionable hunting countries. He was a born horseman, and successive years had brought him experience that he invariably turned to good account.

It would be difficult to find a better man over a country or a better judge of a horse.

In appearance he was clean-shaven, hard-bitten, fair-haired, with a mouth that was set at an angle of seventy-five degrees to his nose. He was of medium height and decidedly slim in limb and body, punctiliously neat in his dress, and when on a horse looked part of the animal himself. Diana was the only goddess he had ever wor-

shipped, and he was never known to express an opinion, good, bad or indifferent, on any one of the fairer sex.

It was on a mild May morning that X. had landed in Ireland with the intention of buying two young horses that he had recently heard of.

After a bath and breakfast at a much-overrated Dublin hotel, he motored out to see a farmer who always bred a good animal.

On arriving at his destination, he inquired whether Mr. Nielly was at home.

"He's not at home to-day, yer Honour," replies Paddy Hoghan, the man of all jobs about the place.

"Not at home!" exclaims X., surprised. "Well, where's the four-year-old by Charles O'Malley? I'd like to see him now I am here."

"Ah, well, well now, that's a grate shame. Mr. Lehey was after him all yesterday, and he'd not lave without the colt. He said he must have him; and that's a fact."

"But I wrote and told Mr. Nielly I hoped to get over and see him this week."

From the look of surprise on Mr. Hoghan's face he was apparently unaware, up to this, as to the identity of the stranger.

"Oh, glory be to Gard! Then you'd be the gintleman what wrote Mr. Naley from England. But he didn't expect yer Honour till next week. He'll be terribly disthressed when he hears."

He ran his fingers through a shock of red hair, and added encouragingly: "Shure there's a nice three-year-old filly we have in the paddock be Troubadour. You shouldn't miss her. She'd win ye races or go honting in any counthrey."

"Let's have a look at her, then," grumbles X., justly annoyed.

"And there's a nice colt in the box here," continues

Paddy, opening the door and showing a well-bred fifteen-hand animal.

On X. making no comment, Paddy suggests: "Maybe he's not the size for ye, but he has grand quality."

"I'm afraid he'd hardly carry my boots," remarks X. shortly, after a rapid scrutiny.

"That's for you to jodge, sorr; yer most plaze yerself. I wonder now——" He strokes an ill-shorn, red, stubbly chin between his forefinger and thumb, then apparently having made up his mind, he closes the door of the box. "I think we'd best have a look at the filly be Troubadour out of Lady Bertha. She has the size—in fact we call her Big Bertha."

They stroll down to a paddock beyond the yard, and there in the far corner stands a handsome brown filly, and X.'s hopes are raised. She allows them to go up to her, and Paddy puts a rope halter over her head, murmuring, "There's a good girl now," as he does so.

Unfortunately, on closer acquaintance she is decidedly disappointing, as her off fore turns in so much that it looks incapable of moving in any direction except sideways.

"Shall I ron her down?" asks Paddy persuasively.

"If you think it's worth while. I doubt her moving at all with that foreleg," observes X., lighting a cigarette and apparently having little further interest in the mare.

Needless to say, the animal does not belie her looks, her off fore swings round out of a straight line like an old-fashioned round-arm bowler at a village cricket match.

"Well, now, ye'd niver belave how she goes in her gallop," says the Irishman, in his rich, persuasive brogue.

"Indeed I would," replies X. truthfully. "She really isn't what I want."

But Paddy is far from being disheartened.

"There's a real gim yit I have to show yer Honour—

a beautiful chistnut mare the master might sell ye. She's be Providence out of Impey's dam. She bides in the carner box in the yard yonder."

"Come along then," says X., buoyed up with the hope that the good wine has been kept till the last.

The door is opened, and standing in the box is a beautiful 16.2 blood-chestnut mare up to fourteen stone.

"Ah, that's more the style!" he exclaims, unable to suppress an enthusiasm which is not so apparent in his companion. "May I see her out?"

"Indade ye may," answers the man, accepting the inevitable and hoping against hope.

She is led out walking short, and later trots decidedly lame.

"A pity she's so lame," X. murmurs, feeling her leg carefully and suspecting her near foot, which appears a shade smaller than the other, whereas the limb is faultless and as hard as iron.

"Trot her on the grass first, then on the path, will you?"

There is no improvement; in fact, she is lamer on the path.

"Yes, she's very lame," he remarks again.

"Lame, is it?" inquires Paddy in simulated surprise. "Indade she's not, sorr. Why should she be?"

"I don't know why she should be, but she is. Probably it's her foot."

"Shure, I've never known her lame before. In fact I can't see it meself," protests Paddy, prepared to go the whole hog while he is about it, as though any nobleman or "gintleman" had ever doubted his word! Then, turning to an individual now leaning over the gate of the yard: "We'll ask Micky Phelan, he's a dacent honest man. Shure he'd tell us whether she's lame or not. Now tell us, Micky, is the mare lame?" he shouts

out, as though prepared, for the honour of the Hoghans, to stand or fall by the decision. Then, giving the mare a smack with his stick, he trots her out at twelve miles an hour, still hoping against hope that a miracle may save the situation.

Now Mr. Phelan was a cattle-drover by trade, which presumably placed his opinion and honour above dispute. Unfortunately his face was far from prepossessing. A low forehead surmounted two little pig-eyes set in a round, red face, that resembled a shrivelled windfall of a russet apple. Raising a time-mellowed bowler hat to scratch his head with the brim, he critically watches the mare, as if almost in doubt. Then, holding a dirty hand across his mouth, he replies in a stage aside to Paddy:

"Yer must admit she's lame. Why, the mare *consints* to it herself."

Poor X., indignant at having wasted so much time, rewards Paddy for his trouble and powers of persuasion, then jumps into the hired car and starts for old Mr. Bramwell, who has a good five-year-old that he has been keeping for him.

After bumping over rough and tortuous lanes, past sundry whitewashed cottages, they reach the highway, where the appearance of the country is less ill-kempt. They pass through a long avenue of overhanging beech trees, whose young leaves, silhouetted against the sky form a canopy overhead that vies with the emerald-green of the fields below. The car pulls up at a lodge standing beside two finely-wrought iron gates, which are opened by a smartly-dressed, fluffy-headed damsel, and they proceed down a carefully-kept drive to the house. This is a long, low building, its trellis covered by many kinds of creeper, now coming into blossom. From the diamond-paned windows there is a vista of green paths disappearing into the bright and variegated colours of

the garden; in the other direction a golden sea of daffodils; and beyond, on the far horizon, the purple mountains. To-day these look quite near in the clear atmosphere, sure indication of rain. With the approach of fine weather, they will again recede in the distance, as though one had set the lens in a telescope incorrectly to suit one's sight.

In bygone years X. had spent his holidays here with young Bramwell, and again he looked with pleasure on the happy hunting-ground of his youth.

"Welcome back, my dear boy!" exclaims Mr. Bramwell, coming out to greet him. "And I hope you will stop the night, or as long as you like."

"I only wish I could," replies X., shaking his host warmly by the hand. "But, as I said in my wire, I'm more than sorry that I can't manage it."

"Well, well, well, another time," replies the old gentleman, genuinely disappointed. "Anyhow, I'm delighted to see you, and I think you'll fall in love with the horse I have for you."

"I'm sure I shall," says X., hoping to get some compensation for the time he had already wasted.

"When Jack knows you have got him," continues Mr. Bramwell, referring to his dead son and accepting the deal as already accomplished, "he'll feel happy. He was devoted to the mare, and up to now I've always sold her stock to his old friends. How he used to love a hunt on old Turkish Delight! Not that she was old in those days."

"Did Jack ever tell you about the hunt we both had at school?" X. asked him.

"He did indeed." The old man fell into a momentary reverie, and then began to tell the story himself. "I remember well. You lads hired a horse apiece just before the Christmas holidays, and when you picked up hounds you found, to your horror, that the Bursar was

also enjoying the sport of kings. He apparently wasn't supposed to be hunting that day, as there was some sort of school conference on, from which the naughty Bursar had pleaded absence on account of most urgent business in London. In fact you all three were transgressing the law. I gather that it became a game of hide-and-seek; in fact it became so obvious, that you rascals smelt a rat. The old boy couldn't report you without committing himself. Later the poor little fellow got cursed for standing on the wrong side of a covert, when he was merely attempting to hide from you tiresome boys. Then, assuming valour to be the better part of discretion, he jumped his old nag over a most unpleasant place in cold blood, sidled up to you lads and whispered: 'You boys shouldn't be out, but I shan't see you to-day, and you mustn't see me.' He glanced fiercely at you two young ruffians. 'I shan't give you a second warning, though. If ever you do it again I'll report you, as sure as eggs are eggs, and for mercy's sake,' he begged, 'don't get into trouble if we have a hunt to-day.'"

"He was a dear little man really," interposed X.

"Yes, but the joke of it was," chuckled old Bramwell, "that hounds found, ran like blazes, and the little man himself took a toss, and Jack, catching his horse for him, remarked, as solemn as a judge: 'Your horse, I believe, sir. Very like our Bursar's mare, but I know he's not out to-day, as he had to stop in for some conference.' Whereupon the Bursar winked and gave Jack half a crown for his trouble."

By the time that Mr. Bramwell had finished these reminiscences the pair had reached the stables, and X. was shown a quite exceptionally nice five-year-old standing in a box bedded knee deep in straw. He was by Battlement out of Turkish Delight. The dam, as we have said, had been a favourite of his host's late son, and the old gentleman always made a point of selling

her stock to someone whom he knew would appreciate them. They had all turned out winners, and this last surpassed his predecessors in looks and character.

His owner never believed in working horses when they were too young, as it was not a question of £ *s. d.* in his case, and the results were truly astounding. No one ever bought from him an unsound horse or one that had been spoilt.

"We sometimes think our geese are swans, but I have little doubt about this fellow, now he's past the cygnet stage," he remarks affectionately, patting the horse's neck.

He was a rich bay standing 16.2, that might best be described as a real cut of a National horse, with perfect movement in all his paces; one of those beautifully symmetrical animals with stamina and quality stamped all over him, and with a beautiful, gracefully-set-on head. The whole expression disclosed the character of the horse; a generous nature, loyalty, reliance and indomitable courage.

He is run out and then a saddle put on. First of all Mr. Bramwell's lad gives a show on him, finishing by extending him up the side of a twenty-acre field, to the extreme satisfaction of X.

"By Jove, what a mover! I should like to get on him for a few minutes."

"Yes, put your leg over him and do what you like with him." Mr. Bramwell lets out the stirrup leather on the near side. "You'll want these a bit longer. Sam's got legs like a dachshund," he laughs, alluding to his man's diminutive disproportions. "Now slip him along: you can pop him over the bank at the end, if you like."

"Right ho!" answers X., cantering off. Before he returns he has let the horse out and jumped him over the bank and back again. From the expression on his

face he is evidently delighted. "I don't mind how far I travel to get one like this. What a feel he gives you!" he exclaims enthusiastically to old Bramwell, "such power, elasticity and perfect smoothness! I call him an *exceptionally* nice horse."

"Yes," agrees his owner. "And that head and eye truly denote his charming disposition and courage. I knew you'd love him. By the way, we call him Crusader; he's in the book, of course."

The buyer was only too pleased to give the price asked, and could but regret that there were no more of the same breeding.

The horse was passed sound. As he had been a big overgrown colt, he had never been backed till a five-year-old, and X. was quite prepared to spend the rest of the year gradually bringing him on. He hacked him throughout the summer, making systematic progress and schooling him over every type of fence.

By the autumn he had furnished into a really beautiful animal, with perfect balance and manners, yet exhibiting all the courage and spirit of his aristocratic ancestry.

The story of this horse's gradual progress, the details of his skilful schooling by X., and their early adventures together in the hunting-field have already been told elsewhere: then, just when master and horse had got on perfect terms and were looking forward to next hunting season together, there befell that calamity which launched poor Crusader out on to an ocean of adversities and vicissitudes.

CHAPTER II

UNDER THE HAMMER

X. was not, after all, to have that season's hunting, owing to the fact that his estates in Australia had ceased to pay any dividend. This was partly due to a succession of droughts, but even more the result of consistent fraud on the part of his manager. Consequently this good sportsman, realising that his presence on the spot was imperative, decided to leave for Sydney at a week's notice, and arranged for the disposal of his horses.

Though we now take leave of our friend, and wish him good luck and a speedy return, we will proceed to follow the career of his young horse.

In due course there appeared in the weekly sporting journals advertisements for the sale of "hunters, the property of Mr. X., who is unable to hunt next winter." A very likely lot they read, and as their owner is never seen on a bad 'un, they will be sure to sell well.

At the bottom of the list we find:

> "Crusader, by Battlement–Turkish Delight, bay gelding, 16.2, 6 yrs.; good hunter. First season horse, but exceptionally fine performer over a country. Beautiful mouth and manners."

This, we are told, is the horse that had carried him so well in the hunt from the Blackthorn Covert to the Lime Kiln Hangings.

Now we generally regard a sale as a gamble for buyer and seller, but it is really a much greater gamble for the horse. It entails a change of home and master;

will it be for better or for worse? What promised to be a lifelong friendship is suddenly broken asunder. Every horse is endowed with a retentive memory, though he is unable to reason for himself. He cannot understand why he has changed hands. Ever willing to give all for his master, he will remember him years after, even if it is only his feel of the rein, possibly on a mouth since hardened by unsympathetic hands.

It was on the Friday of Derby week, in the middle of the London season, a sweltering hot day and the usual congestion of traffic, when X.'s stud wended their way through the Park to Messrs. Tattersall's yard.

In spite of the strangeness of the situation, there had been no mishap to the horses, as a capable guide sent from Messrs. Tattersall had led them through the quietest squares and by-roads unfrequented by motor-buses. Also the old stud groom had wisely put the older and quieter horses at the head and tail of his string. An attentive policeman held up the stream of traffic at the Marble Arch to allow them to enter the Park. Each, led in a snaffle, was wearing summer sheets, kneecaps, bandages and tail pads, and showing his pride of family by the silky coat, swishing tail and long, swinging stride at a walk, only pausing occasionally to take an intelligent interest in the strange sights and sounds of London.

As they round the Hyde Park Corner end of the Row they show considerable excitement at their first glimpse of metropolitan equestrians. Crusader, in spite of the entreaties of the old second horseman leading him, halts, stamps and snorts as though wishing to show spectators what a fine fellow he is compared to the riff-raff of Rotten Row.

Undoubtedly, with few exceptions, both horses and riders of to-day in the Park compare ill with those that our fathers were accustomed to see. Quantity, not

quality, is the order of the day. How seldom we come across a really first-class hack, riding like a lamb, yet looking like a lion, with balance and paces, bridling to the mere weight of the reins. How rare it is to see a really graceful rider, a perfect seat, let alone a "good leg for a boot"! After all, what could be more attractive than a good-looking woman, neatly turned out in a summer habit on a side saddle, modestly confident that she was showing herself and her horse off to the best advantage? A delight to the eyes of all true horsemen, as a rare *objet d'art* appeals to the connoisseur. More often in these days we see cavalcades of overheated and untidy women riding astride in ill-fitting breeches and boots, out of balance and rhythm with the somewhat uneven paces of their hirelings. There are, of course, exceptions, who stand out in marked contrast to their less fortunate companions. If only so many of our present-day equestriennes would realise their individual limitations, how different it would be! Naturally not all women can be endowed with a suitable anatomy for riding astride!

Crusader, with a critical eye, takes in the whole cavalcade moving in all directions and at various paces up and down the Row.

There is a lady of a certain age with golden locks peeping out from underneath a top hat, riding twice as fast as her horse, assisted in her balance by a thongless whip held upside down in her hand. But here in contrast comes another, very neat, who looks the part, on a weight-carrying polo pony; this pair would not look out of place in any hunting field. But what is this? Its profile in the distance, as it turns away from us, looks like a gigantic cottage loaf slipping off a large wooden platter. It is really a very stout old person riding aside—very much aside. She is a kind old thing, and a member of the R.S.P.C.A. Someone has told her that

she is less likely to rub her horse's back if she bumps instead of rising in her saddle at the trot, and she is religiously following the advice given to her.

Then comes a bunch of cheery, rosy-faced children.

She's a kind old thing, and a member of the R.S.P.C.A.

The diminutive Dianas compare all too favourably with their brothers and companions, and it is really pathetic to think that in most cases maturity will rob them of childhood's advantages. Ah! here is a youngster we recognise riding his high-mettled pony with such ease and grace that there is no mistaking his parentage; it's his father's seat (in replica). We know of good sports-

men who, in these hard times, have bequeathed little else to their sons than a good seat and hands on a horse.

The next contingent of children evidently belongs to a less advanced brigade. They are under the charge of an ex-sergeant-major, now employed in civil life teaching the young idea. He belongs to a school now long out of date in the army. He is sitting up stiff as the spiked ends of his waxed moustache, head erect, eyes to the front, vision limited to the space between the horse's ears. An almost straight leg, stirrup on the ball of the foot (a nonsensical military term), toes turned in. This last detail—namely, the toes turned in—he explains to the small boys, is essential if they should one day wish to become cavalry soldiers, to enable them to pass through a narrow defile; both he and his pupils probably visualising some cleft in the rocks through which they can emerge only provided their toes are turned in! The small brats are conscientiously imitating their instructor, thus acquiring rigidness and constraint in place of suppleness and ease.

Next comes a bevy of would-be Rodeo girls, but alas! distance lends enchantment, and they do not stand too close an inspection, except from the front row of the stalls, when, after a sufficiently good dinner to make us late, we unceremoniously, but with hushed apologies, trample over the feet of the more punctual arrivals.

Behind this troop is a natty little riding and jobmaster on quite a nice hack that he hopes may win in the show ring. From the expression on his face he is troubled by mixed anxieties: shall he gallop, to keep an eye on the afore-mentioned musical comedy ladies mounted on his horses, and thus upset his own animal, or shall he leave them and their hirelings to the mercy of Providence and continue to nag his own hack? He wisely decides on the latter course.

Here comes a stout man vainly but courageously attempting to work off his superfluous weight and exercise his liver on a heavy, rough-actioned cob, whose ancestry had been more at home shunting carriages in a railway station yard.

Next we see a stoutish, round-thighed, mutton-fisted, red-faced gentleman in a loud check suit and grey bowler hat, his plump legs straining a tight pair of patent-leather butcher boots. He is riding a showy but somewhat fretful hack—both are in a lather. A large Rolls Royce car awaits him when he feels he has sufficiently disported himself to an admiring crowd. This is the famous Sir Joseph Potts, who has amassed a large fortune in tinned edibles. It is true that Baby Welfare Committees and sundry medical institutions are to some extent affecting his trade; more or less incredulous mothers are now told that tinned fish, rabbit, etc., is not the ideal food on which to nourish their young. Still, he is a man of vast wealth, and with a large collection of recently acquired ancestors now decorating his walls, he poses, to his own satisfaction, as the old country squire, the backbone of England.

Sir Joseph.

Now a self-made man who is a good fellow is a pleasure to meet, and often a sound and sincere friend, but old Potts is what one's grandmother would call a thoroughly vulgar man. Wealth in his case has failed to coat him with even the shadowiest veneer of gentility; he can never resist telling everyone what he paid for this and that. Presumably this very tedious form of conversation may impress a certain class of individual, but it irritates nice people. Mrs. Potts, now Lady Potts, or "Her Ladyship," as her husband calls her, even amongst their own relations, who at the moment is sitting in conscious

magnificence in her silver-plated limousine, awaiting her lord's pleasure, is not so boisterously offensive as Sir Joseph, but merely vulgarly genteel.

"They tell me there's my class of 'orse at Tatt's this week, my dear," he remarks to his spouse as he boards the car, taking off his hat to wipe his heated brow with a bright-coloured bandana handkerchief.

"What do you mean by 'Tatt's'?"

"Why, Tattersall's, to be sure!"

"But, Joseph, I thought that was a gambling den where only bookmakers and very common men consort together!"

"Not at all. It's more like a rendezvous of all the haristocracy and gentry of the country," he replies, lying back in the car and puffing a large cloud of smoke from his cigar as they turn out of the Park past the Cavalry Memorial into Park Lane.

It is now close on one o'clock, the Row is gradually emptying, and Crusader, not recognising his master in this motley crowd, is eventually prevailed upon to continue, with the rest of the stud, to their final destination.

. . . . . .

The Saturday of Derby week is a busy day in Messrs. Tattersall's yard. X.'s men were up betimes, and horses were groomed, legs rubbed and manes plaited. Those who come to look at horses on this day are, as a rule, genuine buyers and dealers.

Crusader is becoming bored with the monotony of having his legs felt, eyes examined, and being trotted up and down the *pavé* outside the boxes. Attempts to make him grunt at the stick are seriously trying his good humour. It is interesting to watch a well-known dealer and first-class judge considering him as a probable purchase.

Horse-dealers, like men of other professions, are of a

type. They will generally be found to have well-cut clothes, and be wearing a billycock (or William Coke) hat from Messrs. Lock, named after its originator, one of the best men over Leicestershire in the 'thirties. A young man starting in the trade will have a very flat brim to his hat, but in time, as success is assured, the bowler will assume more normal proportions. The old-time practice, handed down from father to son in the public school world, of having the bottom button of the waistcoat undone, is universally adopted by the profession; in fact, for success it is essential for a horse-dealer to look the part. Although moustaches are found in some well-known though exceptional cases, an immaculately shaved chin and upper lip is normally adopted. A beard would be merely courting insolvency; no doubt young horses would shy at them to-day as they did at motors in the early days of motoring.

In this case, our dealer friend has made up his mind that he has got to go a bit large, as there will be a lot of people after this horse. He admits he can't fault him. And well up to fourteen stone, too.

Carefully scrutinising him, he notes quality all over; real cut of a National horse. What a beautifully-put-on, well-bred head! a kind, intelligent eye with a general outlook of courage and character; a naturally curved and muscular neck, well-developed withers; great depth through the heart, in conjunction with lengthy, well-laid-back shoulders. What a magnificent fore-hand! What length of rein! Long, muscular fore-arm, big, bony knees; flat, wiry-looking legs, showing good bone with clean ligaments and tendons in parallel lines. No sign of wear in his fetlocks, as he was never hunted before he was five years old. Just the right slope and length of pastern, and standing on even, well-rounded feet with open heels and well-developed frogs. The chest of a weight-carrier, yet without unnecessary bulk.

A strong, short back above well-rounded back ribs, joining up to remarkably powerful loins; long quarters, which make a short-coupled horse stand over a lot of ground. Just a suspicion of a jumping bump at the top of his quarters, which fall with a very gradual curve to the point of his hocks; here again there is an appearance of scope and length from the hip to the hock. The latter is comparatively straight, though large and bony, and wide across when looked at from the front. The whole hind limb is well placed, bringing the shank below the hock neither too far forward nor too far back, but perpendicular to the ground.

Standing behind him, the expert notices the arc of the hind-quarters with muscle on each side, forming with the muscular second thighs two completed figures of eight, supported on two symmetrical hocks. No, he can't fault him. Mr. X. had said that he wanted a good man just to start him next season, and then he would be anybody's horse. Well, if he gets him he will see to that! These high-couraged horses are sometimes spoilt before they are fool-proof—they get into the wrong hands and the seller is blamed!

He beckons a runner who knows his job and bids him take the horse out. It is just as much an art running a horse in hand as riding him.

First of all he is led to and from him. What quality in that walk! The forelegs stretch freely forward, well out in front. There is no question of the toe touching the ground first; and the hind limbs swing forward, each foot coming down well in advance of the track of the forefeet. Each lateral limb, fore and aft, moves forward in a straight line well clear of the other.

Then he trots with an effortless change of balance, perfectly true and straight movement, with that wonderful springiness in each limb, yet without high knee action, such as one sees only in a thoroughbred horse.

On pulling up, with no apparent effort, one can see the veins through his silky coat, bay with black points, and as he turns into his box the sun catches his neck and shoulders, which gleam like burnished copper.

The dealer merely confirms his first opinion. He's a horse worth paying for, and he hopes he may get him.

At 5 p.m. the horses are again in peace for the night. Sunday, for horses in this country, is generally observed as a day of rest. Elsewhere they may race and hunt,

That Kruschen feeling.

but here the time-honoured custom of a rest and carrots for the horses after church is generally maintained. Our equine friend's observance of the Sabbath is especially noticeable on Monday morning, when he develops that Kruschen feeling so disturbing to masters and grooms.

Sunday at Tattersall's is not quite the same, especially at the time of a fashionable sale in the middle of the London season.

From midday onwards the yard and stables will be crowded; some come to look at the horses, others to

see their friends and talk. Hunting acquaintances from every country will meet there, whereas they might spend weeks in London without seeing each other, so large has London society become. Love of the horse is a common bond of fellowship, and many are the greetings and renewals of friendship to be made at a mid-season sale. We can read in the Tube, "Come to Selfridge's and see your friends"; we cannot help feeling that a similar invitation would be equally applicable at the head of Messrs. Tattersall's sale catalogue.

Now let us have a look at Crusader in his box. To judge by the crowd outside the door he does not lack admirers, even if they are not all buyers.

In the absence of his master, strangers are trying to extract information from the old groom, who is a man of few words, with no interest in life save his horses. We just caught his answer to Sir Joseph Potts' query:

"Tell me, my man, do you think he's my 'orse?"

"The horse is what he looks, sir, a gentleman, and they are very rare these days."

Old Potts is too thick-skinned to take this otherwise than as a compliment to himself. He rather fancies himself as a judge of a horse—bred in him, so to speak, inherited from generations of Potts ancestors. In point of fact he really buys on public opinion.

Crusader, who is stripped on this warm summer day, seems fully aware of the fact that he is the centre of admiration, and regards the questioner disdainfully, as though he considered him a lower type of brute creation.

Amongst his visitors is a young lady who has fallen in love with Crusader and knows he is exactly what she wants, if only her father can be induced to pay the necessary price. She puts herself on good terms with the old groom by remarking that he must be terribly sorry at losing such a horse, and gently strokes Crusader's

soft muzzle. She whispers to a friend that she feels positively socialistic when she sees old Potts after a horse, because it is no use Pauper (as she affectionately calls her father) attempting to compete with him; a somewhat novel conception of Socialism.

The next visitor is a youngish man who is a capital sportsman and dearly loves a good horse. Though his stable is overflowing he is quite prepared somehow to squeeze in another, and this one certainly looks the part. But his position as a potential buyer is difficult, owing to the fact that his wife, being the capitalist of the family, feels constrained also to provide the leavening influence of prudence. She has already put down her small foot, and resolutely declared that it is out of the question to buy any more till there has been some clearance in the present establishment. Having been won over so often before, she feels now that the time has come to make a stand, and there the matter rests.

The next is a gentleman who knows Crusader out hunting and is a great friend of his owner's. He is certainly prepared to go to his limit for any of his friend's horses, though he doubts if he can get this particular one, but he will be there to-morrow to bid them up.

Then comes a foreigner who asks:

"E is vaire good 'orse for ze Concours Hippique, no?"

This rather flummoxes the taciturn old groom.

"'E knows to jump?" explains the gentleman.

"Oh, yes, 'e knows to jump," replies the old man in broken English, believing that this will assist the foreign gentleman to understand him.

The next is a hard-bitten, dapper little man who has a stud of his own up for sale. He is the best of judges, and sells annually, placing his horses with consistent success. He hates to miss a good youngster, and is not afraid to give a good price.

It's a confounded nuisance, he thinks to himself, that these horses come up before his own.

The next is a M.F.H. who hunts his own hounds; he's "awfully taken" with the horse, but wonders if he is finished enough for his job. If only X. were here he could ask him whether he is what he calls a one-handed horse.

Then there is a responsible gentleman buying for Royalty. His difficulty is that he hasn't ridden the horse himself; besides, he's only a first-season animal. If he buys him and he is not a success, some officious comptroller will be on to him, raking up past failures. If he lets him go, it is a doubtful consolation to say there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, when there are really not enough good fish to go round.

Then comes an optimistic gentleman who hopes to buy him cheap because he has always bought his own horses cheap. He is what is described as a gentleman coper, and he is now in the middle of a complicated transaction. As a small boy at school he was a champion stamp swopper. That means, that if he had a duplicate stamp in his collection, value nil, and knew another boy who had a stamp worth something, which the latter did not want, he went to work on a swop. Young Jacky, as he was known in those days, would then proceed to explain to his victim, probably a new boy, that his own stamp was really worth two of the other's. Eventually he would magnanimously agree to what he called a square deal, namely, swopping his stamp of no value for one of his victim's. Jacky in his mature years became a swopper of horses. It is a similar art; he would swop the known bad horse for what he was confident of being a less bad horse. To hear him eulogising his own animal would make one wonder why he ever wished to part with it. There was the same magnanimous air and open-handedness that he exhibited

in his early school-boy days. In this particular case he was trying to swop two horses—both, of course, paragons of equine virtue—in exchange for one horse plus an oat-crusher and £150 thrown in to make it a square deal. If he could pull this off he would have a go for that nice young horse of X.'s.

Then followed scores of others, some with no hope of buying, some hoping for a bad sale, some wishing they had waited for this sale before they bought their last horses, others wishing they had sold some of their antique stable inmates to make room for fresh blood.

So, if we analyse the possible buyers, we will see that, with few exceptions, they would all be certain purchasers, were it not for the numerous "Ifs."

. . . . . .

Monday morning is the real day of business. All the staff of the firm are busy, vets. are much in demand, runners are running, horses are trotting and the place is filling with prospective buyers. Outside the yard loaf seedy individuals who once were grooms, now out of jobs, some through their besetting sin, others, poor fellows, through sheer bad luck due to hard times.

The sale proceeds, and the horse we are interested in comes up at 1.15 p.m. Most of Sunday's visitors can be seen pressing round the rostrum. The auctioneer reads out the catalogue description of Crusader in an apparently disinterested voice, knowing full well that he has several big buyers all eager to get the horse.

"Will anybody bid me three hundred for Crusader? An exceptionally good-looking horse and sound. To be sold without reserve."

X.'s friend starts the bidding at three hundred guineas.

"Three hundred guineas I'm bid for Crusader!" proclaims the auctioneer; and in an incredibly short time he runs the bidding up to five hundred and fifty guineas,

when there is a pause, at which price our dealer friend walks away from further temptation.

"Trot him down again," directs the auctioneer, after which bidding recommences briskly till it reaches seven hundred.

"Seven hundred in two places," chants the auctioneer. "Seven-fifty—seven-fifty—seven-fifty—may I make it eight hundred? A pity to lose the horse, sir." He catches the eye of a gentleman, who consents with a nod. "Thank *you*, sir, your bid—eight hundred—eight-fifty—eight-fifty—any advance on eight-fifty?—Going-for-eight-hundred-and-fifty guineas!" And down comes the hammer.

'Airy Hiels.

Who has bought the horse.

A peculiar-looking individual who does not look worth fifty guineas says he has bought the horse for Sir Joseph Potts. For some reason this gentleman does not bid himself. Possibly he got the idea from the fact that Royalties send their equerries to bid, or that certain noblemen are represented by their Master of the Horse, or it may be due to some subtle reason we cannot fathom. Potts' agent in this case was a red-faced, bulldog type of man who rejoiced in the name of Henry Hiels, and who was more commonly known as Hairy Hiels. He had once been a jockey, but being suspended for foul riding early in his career, gave up the unequal contest with the Stewards and took to drowning his misfortunes periodically in strong drink. About this time he was one of those individuals who exist by working commissions on the turf. Many of his clients may be seen in the Forfeit List published in the Racing Calendar. How he and Potts became acquainted with

each other is not known, except that birds of a feather flock together, and their acquaintance actually started before the latter's more prosperous days. They both knew enough about each other to keep their mouths

That night Crusader took up his abode in the Potts' ancestral stables.

shut, but where the ex-jockey has a pull over Potts is, that whereas there is nothing to be got out of him, the pseudo county magnate can be bilked of a bit of ready when funds are low.

Pauper had done his best for his daughter, and although he had gone to fifty pounds beyond his limit,

he was soon out of the running. X.'s pal, hearing that Potts wanted the horse, had bid up merrily to £500, but as he could not see that gentleman himself in the yard he did not dare risk going further, and it was left with the dapper little man whose horses are coming up later to spring a bit more, then he drops out, and the field is left clear to the M.F.H. and Potts' agent. The latter has orders to buy the horse at any price, and he gets him eventually at the above-mentioned figure.

When Crusader returns to his box the old stud groom inquires morosely who has bought him.

"I did hear as it were old Pork and Beans, mate, but I dunno for sure," says the runner.

"Well, the horse won't keep sich company long," remarks the old man, with a suspicion of tears in his eyes.

That night Crusader was unboxed at a small country station and took up his new abode in the Potts' ancestral stables; and we do not see him again till next hunting season.

CHAPTER III

THE POTTS' ANCESTRAL HOME

KINGSMEDE, the seat of Sir Joseph Potts, is a stately Elizabethan house standing far away back in its well-timbered grounds. The old grey stone of its front, mellowed by the passage of years, is innocent of creepers, the tall arms-emblazoned oriel windows which flank either side of the massive oaken doors beneath their gabled porch being deemed of sufficient beauty to adorn that aspect. Through the old lead-latticed mullions one looks across a sweep of well-groomed gravel, and on, over a wide vista of grassland as far as the eye can reach, on to an infinite horizon of Monarch oaks. Successive generations of De la Pourts had added to the building, but with such artistry and architectural skill had each addition been conceived, that the original beauty of the house had not in any way been marred. As it was grouped now, the main buildings enclosed a grass quadrangle, whose interior walls were covered with magnificent wistaria and giant magnolias.

The house and about six thousand acres had for many generations been in the hands of the De la Pourt family, who came to this country with William the Conqueror, But in the course of years they had fallen upon evil times, and the last Sir Heremon De la Pourt had found himself in very straitened circumstances when he inherited some few years ago. His father having been a spendthrift, the son found little to spend and much to maintain. Owing to the dilapidated state of the house, he was only able to live in a few rooms of one

wing, previously at the disposal of the housekeeper and still-room maids. In order to pay his gambling debts, his father had resorted to the ingenious if not original plan of dismantling all the old lead from the roof and drain-pipes, as this was known to contain an alloy of which a large proportion was silver. Although he kept the bailiffs out of the house, he let the rain in. His successor, whose education had been entirely neglected, had little chance of restoring the property. He married much beneath himself, sold the land, house and contents, and emigrated with his family to Canada.

Sir Joseph Potts bought the entire property as soon as it came into the market. A desire to be in the fashion rather than natural good taste influenced him in the choice of an architect, and the famous Sir Egbert Landrail was commissioned to restore the mansion. This he did in the most artistic and thorough manner, and to-day the original structure stands, although thoroughly modernised, in all the characteristic beauty of its period.

Sir Egbert had early appreciated the Potts mentality, and only undertook the work provided he had a perfectly free hand. Thus he satisfied his own artistic sense in restoring the interior and, where necessary, replacing derelict furniture with the best period pieces obtainable.

The result was indeed a masterpiece. He seems to have taken an impish delight in picturing the Potts family, here in austere Tudor grandeur; there amid more ornate Jacobean designs; while in another suite of rooms the flashy, squat little figure of the millionaire would, by contrast, enhance the charm and proportions of delicate Hepplewhite and Adams work.

Her ladyship's boudoir was essentially Queen Anne, with wonderful bat's wing walnut cabinets and an exceptional Buhl mirror reflecting her plump figure. The drawing-room was a dream of Chippendale's crafts-

manship, and, should he wish, Sir Joseph could dispose of the superfluous ash on his Corona cigar against the Grinling Gibbons carvings.

The subtle charm of contrast amused Sir Egbert. It was as if a celebrated artist had painted a raucous and thirsty-looking bookmaker gazing into a lily pool, listening to the plash of a Louis XIV fountain playing in the sunshine, a vellum edition of "Paradise Lost" in one hand, and a frothing mug of beer in the other.

With the utmost care, and at great expense to the owner, even the missing panes in the mullioned windows had been replaced with glass of the same tints and texture.

Naturally one cannot expect an artistic genius to be as practical as a plumber; one works for artistic effect, the other for everyday utility. This failing, or the architect's merry wit, may have accounted for the complex conditions arising from modernising the interior. For instance, the library, where one might hope to beguile away hours in peaceful reading, in the new arrangement of rooms became the only way of reaching the dining-room from the kitchen, unless one went through the outside courtyard. Again, someone occupying a particular bathroom would either lock in or lock out three of the guests from their allotted rooms, and many other minor disadvantages existed. But as Sir Joseph would say, "The 'ole 'ouse was replete with all modern himprovements and yet retained its hold feudal haspect." It certainly had no resemblance to his previous house, Laburnum Villa, Bermondsey, where Mr. and Mrs. Potts, as they then were, had spent the first years of their married life.

After his second glass of port old Potts would explain to his guests that the Potts were really another branch of the De la Pourts, the name becoming De la Pott, and later anglicised to Potts. In fact, one of the unnamed

ancestral portraits in the hall was now catalogued "Plantagenet Potts, *circa* 1540." The family likeness to the De la Pourts of the same period was really remarkable. Unfortunately, even the genius of Sir Thomas Orps, R.A., failed to produce the same family resemblance in the full-size portrait, now hung in the dining-room, of Sir Joseph, arrayed in his red coat for hunting: "In full fig," as the sitter described himself—a term which he also applied facetiously to the bronze Mercury standing on a pedestal in the corner of the room.

The dining-room itself, long, oak-panelled, oak-beamed, was perfect in every detail. Unfortunately, supplying the dining-room plate had not been part of Sir Egbert's contract; and as the De la Pourt plate presumably was sold at the same time as the lead of the roof, there was nothing in keeping with the furniture of the period. Potts, who had adopted the De la Pourt crest, now had it engraved on all the very ornate modern plate with which he had provided himself. The Potts silver clashed no less violently with the other objects in the room than did Sir Joseph himself with the numerous high-nosed De la Pourts who gazed incredulously down upon him from their venerable gilded frames.

It is in this same room in mid-November that we now see Sir Joseph after dinner. He is sitting at the end of the long refectory table with his male guests, her Ladyship having manœuvred the ladies out into the big drawing-room by way of the picture gallery, morning-room and library, a practice that Sir Joseph always insisted on. It was also his custom on such occasions to issue the stable orders for the following day, while his guests devoted their attention to his cigars and liqueurs.

Presently Mr. Martingale, the stud groom, is announced.

No wise master would keep his groom up till a late

hour for orders and expect him to be up and about at cockcrow; but this did not trouble Mr. Martingale, who was never an early riser, and on these occasions it was his usual custom, before retiring, to split a bottle of port with old Vintage, the butler, shortly to be promoted to Groom of the Chambers.

Martingale had, so to speak, lived all his life in aristocratic circles. He had a much deeper knowledge of the Peerage than the Stud Book; in fact he found considerable difficulty in knowing how to address a simple esquire with no handle to his name. He was a quite worthless but exceedingly plausible individual; it was only a question of time before each successive master saw through him. He looked so honest that it was impossible to believe him otherwise, and it was still even more difficult to prove it. Though they might suspect him of selling oats and taking large commissions all round, his masters, to avoid unpleasantness, would invariably dismiss him for some other reason, such as reduction of staff, wintering abroad, and the like.

Consequently, he had amassed quite a budget of fairly good characters extending over thirty years. However, coming to a newly-created industrial Knight was a lower rung in the ladder than he had previously been accustomed to, but, as he remarked on being engaged, "One mustn't be too particular these democratic days!"

Generally his horses looked sleek and fat, this condition being chiefly due to lack of both exercise and fresh air. He always had a reason and an excuse for every mishap, and traded largely on the ignorance of his employer. He thoroughly disapproved of veterinary surgeons, proclaiming that it was a waste of his Lordship's or his Grace's money employing an expensive and experienced stud groom if they had to call in the aid of a practitioner—not that he was a certificated man himself, but he had had experience in the best stables. His real

abhorrence of vets. was due to the fact that they might give away a few stable secrets to his master.

On occasions like to-night he would appear smartly dressed in a blue serge suit, a flat bird's-eye blue stock tie and collar and a massive gold watch chain, a token of esteem from a noble family before suspicion had been awakened.

On his arrival conversation proceeded somewhat on these lines:

Sir Joseph. "Good-evening, Martingale."

Martingale. "Good-evening, your Grace. Beg pardon, my Lord, or rather I should say Sir Joseph—Sir——"

Sir Joseph. "'Ow be the 'orses?"

Martingale. "There isn't a horse what's looked back since I had the privilege of looking after them, Sir Joseph!"

Sir Joseph. "Well, I'm sure they didn't ought to neither from what they're eatin'!"

Martingale. "Well, I give them the same as I used to feed his Grace the Duke of Poplar's horses. He was a hard man too, sir—I might say a fearless 'orseman. Only the other morning I was saying, as I went round the stables before the lads came down, 'Yes,' I says, 'it's the same class of horse as his Grace had, and the same class of horseman to ride 'em.' But, as I says, both his Grace and Sir Joseph are gentlemen what will only have the best of everything in their stables—no matter what price I have to pay to get the best. It's a very different kettle of fish for Mr. Crupper, what's groom to Sir William Wortlebury, Bart. Sir William rides to doctor's orders, as you might say, not to hounds."

Sir Joseph. "Well, now—what about to-morrow? 'Ounds meet 'ere 10.45 a.m."

Martingale. "I had thought first horse Crusader, what you bought off Mr. X. He's looking a picture, sir. Twice the horse he was when you bought him. Then there's Pearl Finder, what you bought after last Royal Show; he'd do second. I always says that's a National 'orse, sir. Or there's Housefly and Enterprise, or Double Bed first and Niel Haig second?"

Sir Joseph. "Well, let's say the first pair. I 'aven't ridden Crusader yet, but they say 'e's my 'orse. That'll give me 'Ousefly and Henterprise Friday, Double Bed and Niel 'Aig Saturday. And, Martingale, 'ave all the men turned out smart ready to 'old 'orses. To-morrow 'er Ladyship keeps *maison ouverte* —French for free masonry of the 'unting field, you know."

Martingale. "Very good, Sir Joseph."

With that Potts and his guests join the ladies in a game of pyramids and Martingale joins old Vintage in a bottle of port, their common bond of fellowship.

. . . . . .

Next morning Sir Joseph is awakened early by the sound of the gardeners raking the gravel in front of the house in preparation for the meet of the hounds.

It is a fine morning, and Potts jumps out of bed and struts across to a window, his rotund figure silhouetted through a somewhat diaphanous suit of primrose-coloured crêpe-de-Chine pyjamas, the very latest creation from Peal and Thinman, world famed for gent.'s hose and underwear.

He gazes out on one of the finest views in England. In one direction there is the long straight avenue of limes leading over the old stone bridge that spans the River Nene. In the foreground is a wide expanse of well-kept lawn, with here and there magnificent cedars, in some cases their lower arms supported by timber

struts lest they be beaten down by a heavy fall of snow. There is a circular sunk fence surrounding the pleasure grounds and beyond it meadowland extending up to a mile or so on each side of the stream. Gradually the country rises, and beyond the woodlands in the distance can be viewed the wild, rolling downs.

Through the other window may be seen the terraced gardens, bounded on one side by an immense, time-mellowed, red-brick wall that for many years had sheltered the long herbaceous border.

From here he can also see over the top of the high yew hedge into the rose garden. This is so sheltered by the long wall on the northern side, and by the massive yew hedges, that the roses have been known not to shed their frost-bitten petals till long after the opening meet.

From the rose garden a winding grass path, bordered again by yew hedges, saunters down a pergola, at the end of which is an old green door in what is locally known as "the snail-creep wall," wanders on into the Dutch garden, and still on, through the cherry orchard, to the stables. There had been life and stir already here for some time, though the great Mr. Martingale had not yet made his appearance.

We wonder how much Sir Joseph appreciated the charm of his surroundings as the rising sun appeared over the hills, softly awakening Nature and gradually dispelling the faint blue haze that hung like a mirage over the valley? It is more probable that his thoughts led in other directions. Would his Grace of Tumbledown be there this morning? Would the rôles of Martingale and Vintage be carried out in a manner befitting their master's position in the country? Would hounds find where it was anticipated? There was generally a fox, though a bad one, in the shrubbery at the back, but with the crowd of foot people, motors and horses, foxes are early afoot, and cannot always be found on the day

they are wanted. Still, the withy bed was a quiet, snug place that would not be disturbed, and an almost certain find. Then there was Gossamer Wood, which harboured a litter of cubs, but from there they must run over the Watcombe Vale, and the fences are big and blind, even for us fearless 'orsemen Martingale talks of.

"That's a beautiful 'orse, that Crusader! Think I shall sit for Mullings on 'im. 'Sir J. Potts, descendant of Plantagenet Potts, *circa* 1540, on his famous 'orse Crusader.' Why, the very name makes me feel the blood of our crusading hancestors coursing through my veins! Wonder if the Duchess will come too? I wish she and Mrs. P. would click. The Duke may be the biggest covert owner in the country, but us Potts and De la Potts come 'ere afore 'im. The Master's a good enough chap, but 'is fault is that 'e's the same to everyone; don't make no distinction between a £25 subscription and a £250 one—'e'd ought to know better. If we only got free-and-heasy-like with the ducal party, the rest would follow suit like sheep. Don't know 'ow a sheep does follow suit, but still—— Wish it didn't make me sweat so free talking to the Duchess! Funny too, 'cos I'm not a shy man with the ladies. In fact, we Potts 'ave always 'ad a weakness for the fairer sex. When I was a member of the old Amphibious Club, Lord! what nights we 'ad! I can mind the night I climbed up the chandelier at supper for a kiss from Polly Perkins, and she ran a 'at-pin into me in the taxi after. Couldn't 'elp but laugh in spite of it. Lord, she *was* a——"

"Your bath's ready, Sir Joseph," says the valet, knocking and entering the room, "and her Ladyship's maid has come to ask whether you think her Ladyship should wear her suede shoes or patent leather."

"Oh, tell her to wear one on each foot," grunts Sir Joseph, annoyed at the interruption and still reminis-

cing on Polly Perkins and the pleasures of the past. Then, turning to the valet, who is helping him into his silk dressing-gown, he directs him to tell the maid that her Ladyship should rig herself out in her Sunday best, " seeing as 'ow she will be hentertaining the 'ole county, from 'is Grace downwards."

He then dashed into the blue-tiled bathroom, emptied the best part of a large cut-glass bowl of bath salts into the water and jumped in himself.

It would be wasting our readers' time to give any account of the Potts' breakfast; obviously both had their nerves on edge with the prospect of *maison ouverte*. In spite of the damp underfoot, her Ladyship was wearing the suede shoes.

CHAPTER IV

BILLY LINES' HOUNDS MEET AT KINGSMEDE

At about 10.15 a.m. some of the early arrivals began to appear, it having been broadcasted throughout the country that there would be food and drink for all. Speculation on the subject went so far as to suggest that a well-known firm of London caterers had been engaged for the occasion; that large marquee tents had been pitched and a bandstand had been erected.

But Sir Joseph was no fool, and though, judged by certain standards, he was a bounder, he was sufficiently intelligent to know how to do things properly. His weakness was his consummate conceit, based on the belief that money made a gentleman.

To-day he was hail-fellow-well-met with all comers. He divided his guests into two categories: number one, those whom he asked to come in and have a word with her Ladyship; number two, those to be ministered to out-of-doors.

One of the first to arrive is old Hackett, who farms six hundred acres of his own land, and in spite of the decline of farming in recent years, has bought and started his two sons on adjacent farms. Even though he is somewhere near the three-score years and ten limit, he is an undeniable man to hounds, and strangers are told, when in difficulties, to keep their eyes on old Hackett.

Then comes Boss, the local horse-dealer, with his contingent of hirelings out for the day.

It is not an enviable existence, a hireling's. He

may get a rider who is determined to get his money's worth for the day, or a less exacting individual, in which case the wretched horse will have to come out again all the sooner. To-day the old roan is to carry Miss Snowball, the piano-maker's daughter, and if the com-

It having been broadcasted throughout the country that there would be drink for all.

bination is one of harmony rather than discord he may again find himself in private ownership.

Here comes a gentleman in a swallow-tailed coat on a good-looking blood chestnut. He is Archie Languid. Though twice married, he's again a bachelor and not yet a widower. He started married life too young—in fact immediately he left Oxford, before he had had time to sow his wild oats. If he had been fortunate enough to marry the right person in the first instance,

he might have been the best of husbands; but she was an erratic, self-centred creature, incapable of deep affection, and a good many years his senior. She had an insatiable thirst for what she considered smart society—in other words, a snob. Her sole recreation was gambling, and her dislike for the country was deep-rooted and sweeping, whereas Archie's chief interest in life lay in his estate and his horses. So they drifted apart, with the usual consequences, and what might normally have been mere comradeship between him and other women became more serious affairs. A makeshift, peace-at-any-price domestic policy gradually developed into sullen warfare, and eventually resulted in the breaking of the nuptial ties. His last affair, though regularised by matrimony, turned out, as everyone anticipated, to be no better than the first attempt. Archie was convinced that raven locks and that bellicose temperament peculiar to his first wife invariably went together, and optimistically believed that the flaxen tresses of his second choice promised a peaceful future. But alas! he was doomed to disappointment. This lady's physical charms were such that she could not resist the satisfaction she derived from innumerable conquests and subsequent entanglements. Each went their own way, and eventually she decamped with a professional skater of foreign extraction, and now both may be seen on the films, thus reducing Archie to bachelorhood for the second time. He now filled his house with bachelor friends and semi-detached ladies who lived on his generosity, and the house got a *mauvaise* reputation in the neighbourhood, and was barred by those county families who still observed the old order of things. Those who flattered themselves on their broadmindedness went there; some, as they said, for poor Archie's sake, others to be amused by the society of good-looking women whose social position

might be difficult to determine, to consume good dinners and to hear good stories, the scintillations of Archie's cheerful bachelor friends.

Like many another victim of misfortune, Archie sought distraction with less wisdom than assiduousness, but in spite of his failings he was a good fellow at heart.

With him came young Lord Biffington, a rather timid youth, who was successfully inveigled into the presence of her Ladyship. The poor lad, who was really too shy to say no, now stands before her, fumbling nervously with his hat. Lady Potts, wishing to show due deference to his exalted rank and also to put him at his ease, suggests:

"Won't the noble Viscount rest 'is 'at?" indicating a chair for the purpose. Fortunately the entrance of other favoured ones relieves the situation, and young Biffington escapes, walking stealthily out on tip-toe over the parquet floor in the half-brazen, half-timid way that people leave church before the sermon and the offertory.

Punctually at 10.45 the hounds turn up. The bitch pack are out to-day, and though they may not show themselves to advantage on the flags, they kill their foxes, as the Master, who carries the horn, has always bred from good working hounds, irrespective of looks.

> "As well as shape, full well he knows,
> To *kill* their fox they must have nose."

The Master, the Rev. William Lines, known to his friends as Billy Lines, is a clean-shaven, hard-bitten, cheery-countenanced, fox-hunting parson, and a very human man. In his hunting cap he does not look forty, but he must be well on the weather side of fifty. What he does not know about hunting is not worth picking up: never an ambitious horseman, after twenty-three seasons of hunting hounds on cheap

screws he is now a bit cautious. Nevertheless, his knowledge of the country and an instinctive sense of the line a fox will take enable him to be always at hand whenever his hounds require assistance. To-day he is riding a varminty-looking, hog-maned, rat-tailed grey mare, that shows quality, but wear, and a discerning eye would spot a crossed arrow on her dappled hind-quarters.

His field on the whole are genuine fox-hunters, consequently he allows his hounds plenty of time to work out their own line before he attempts to lift them. Under these circumstances he shows very consistent sport, and kills his foxes. No man has a better hound voice, to which his pack readily responds.

The Reverend Billy Lines, M.F.H.

Though a Reverend, he has not practised for many years, if one may apply a medical term to a Doctor of Divinity. At the same time, he is always prepared to take the service on Sunday for any of his brothers of the cloth who are ill or require a rest, and his sermons are reputed to be ten minutes of the best.

He is beloved by the whole countryside, as he has an equally charming manner with all and sundry; yet when occasion demands, no man can speak out his mind with more directness.

"Good-morning, Master, and welcome to Kingsmede!" exclaims Sir Joseph, stumping out of the house across the gravel to greet him. "Come in and 'ave some refreshment and a word with 'er Ladyship."

"Well, I won't come in, if you'll excuse me. But please give my regards to Lady Potts," he replies, calling a young hound and throwing him a bit of

biscuit, to distract his attention from the alluring spectacle of a footman loaded with sandwiches.

The Master was, in fact, a bit nervous of going into the house, as he was handicapped to-day by the absence of his first whip, and if he went in, hounds would soon run him to ground there, to the discomfiture of himself and her Ladyship.

He accepts a glass of port, as he says, "For the good of the house and to gladden the heart of man." Old Potts hastens to assure him that it's a nice vintage port that he got at 106*s.* a dozen at the late Lord Bumper's sale.

Sir Joseph then proceeds to inform him where he will surely find a fox, and the Rev. William, who is in closer touch with the situation than his host, both as regards finding and earth stopping, listens to the information with well-feigned interest.

During this conversation the field has considerably increased in numbers. There are half a dozen officers from the neighbouring garrison town, who are all bosom friends of the Master. He delights to see soldiers out hunting, as he considers it part of their training, and essential for the safety of the Empire. He strongly maintains that an eye for a country, determination to get there, physical fitness and care for the horse, even in this mechanical age, are military attributes worthy of encouragement.

Next comes little Faucet, the sporting solicitor, with young Butterworth, the brewer's son and heir, but unless the latter works more, drinks less and leaves the girls alone, the old man, they say, will certainly disinherit him. He has got into bad company, and is trying to get a bit of free legal advice from the good-natured Faucet.

There is pretty Miss Diana Gibson, whose father, alias "Pauper," had failed to secure Crusader at

Tattersall's. Though besieged by an army of admirers, this charming young lady is quite unspoilt. She is spending the winter with her aunt, Lady Mary, a power in the land, who, sad to relate, has not yet called on the Potts, and, what makes it even more galling to

Diana.

them, she frequently entertains Royalty at Rushworth, the neighbouring estate to Kingsmede.

To Potts' annoyance he now sees the Duke of Tumbledown's horses a hundred yards down the lime avenue, and before he can contrive to get them into a more central position, his Grace arrives in his car beside them. He exchanges his cap for a top hat, his apron for his whip, clambers up on to his first horse and walks up to the house.

His Grace is a well-set-up, middle-aged man, a good

all-round sportsman, a keen agriculturist and exceedingly good-natured. His failings are his tendency to be absent-minded and his lack of social small talk apart from field sports and tillage of the land. He had once been known to turn up at a croquet tournament in September with his loader and guns, having noted the appointment in his calendar of forthcoming events, but failed to fill in necessary minor details.

Inspired solely by the best intentions, he was heard only recently at a dinner-party repeatedly inquiring after a "late" lamented, somewhat in the following manner. Turning to Mrs. Brown he exclaimed genially:

"Next time you come you really mustn't leave Algy behind!" Non-committal and somewhat evasive explanations according to circumstances. After an interval he returns again to the subject, this time persisting enthusiastically:

"Now, promise me to make old Algy come and dine. Dig him out, wet or fine! We'll always send the car for you." Explanations this time more definite. Once again after a suitable interval he tackles the problem, this time affectionately:

"Poor old Algy! I haven't seen him for ages. Tell him from me there is always a bed for you both—dine and sleep. It's our duty to get him out of his shell; don't you agree with me?"

Explanations forcible and, we hope, final.

Still, everyone overlooks the Duke's idiosyncrasies, some because he is a Duke, others because they know he is a really good fellow, though a bit absent-minded.

His wife is an exceedingly indolent woman, who more often gives offence by being too lazy to be civil than from any motive of pride, to which her discourteousness is generally ascribed.

"Good-morning, your Grace, good-morning," says

old Potts, beaming with perspiration and *bonhomie*, uncertain whether he is regretting the absence of the Duchess or not.

"Good-morning, good-morning," replies the Duke, groping in his mind for his host's name.

"Well, Mr. Fox, I hope you have got a Pott for us to-day," he continues, mentally patting himself on the back for saving the situation.

"Will your Grace 'ave a drop of something?" Potts asks, running through the wine list like a *maître d'hôtel* keeping back the prices till the bill should be rendered. Eventually some sloe gin and a *pâté-de-foise-gras* sandwich are selected by the guest, who knows he has a message from his wife, but can't for the life of him remember what it is.

"I'm sorry the Duchess didn't accompany you," says Potts, pulling on a tight wash-leather glove over his squat, chunky fingers.

"Ah, well, unfortunately she promised weeks ago to lunch with the Saltburns," replies the Duke genially, remembering that his wife had begged him to say something. Unfortunately the Saltburn family have just made their appearance, and, unaware of the awkward situation produced by their arrival, are smiling at their host.

The message that her Grace had really impressed on him was, to assure them that his wife had been so anxious to call on Lady Potts for ever so long, but she had been such a martyr to neuralgia lately that she did not dare face the cold weather. But to-day was such a lovely day, and she had been looking forward to coming over, when she got a wire saying her mother was ill.

Naturally the poor Duke could not remember all this, especially as he had not listened to half of it; he was trying at the same time to memorise the address

of a Dutch oil-cake merchant that he had meant to give to his bailiff before he started that morning.

Just as hounds are due to move off, Lady Potts, looking very agitated, comes up to Sir Joseph and whispers:

"My dear, the photographer is here and all ready, but what are we to do? His Grace can't be found! He was last seen going round to the stables, where his second horseman is now holding his horse, but he says he don't know where his Grace has got to."

"Well, I 'opes Martingale 'ad fresh straw down," says Potts to himself, and aloud to his wife:

"Tell the man to wait, my dear."

Unfortunately Billy moves off punctual to time, and we regret to say the photograph was never taken.

Poor Lady Potts, looking harassed and crestfallen, watched the gay cavalcade disappear round the corner of the handsome old stable buildings. For weeks passed she had been looking forward to seeing the photograph in the weekly illustrated papers. She had pictured in her own mind a group becomingly posed on the front steps, Sir Joseph and herself in the middle, and the Duke in close proximity; the men standing with a toe stuck out at right angles and firmly grasping their whips in the manner peculiar to dismounted fox-hunters; the ladies with hitched-up habits exposing an elegant boot, and, underneath, the names, probably strangely mixed up, but no matter, so long as the centre group of titled personalities was made known throughout the length and breadth of the land.

CHAPTER V

SNOW IN NOVEMBER

Down the drive jogs Billy Lines, the pack around his horse's heels, and as he turns right-handed over the grass round the sunk fence, some of the young hounds are inclined to spreadeagle a bit wide; but Billy's reproachful chiding, "Gently there, Wayward; have a care, Hopeful!" brings them back again. Eventually he reaches the Shrubbery, where he stands still, and the pack anxiously awaits his word and gesture, eager to be launched into covert.

Generally speaking, a shrubbery conveys to one the idea of a mass of laurels, some rhododendrons and holly, the type of evergreen shrub that thrives even under the shade of larger trees. But the Shrubbery at Kingsmede was the handiwork of an earlier De la Pourt, who had been a renowned arboriculturist. It consisted of many of the rarest trees and shrubs, planted out in the shape of an arc, and extending over some forty acres, with converging rides in the centre.

The Lady De la Pourt of the day had begged that it might be kept as a sanctuary for wild birds, and no bird was ever destroyed within the precincts of the Shrubbery. But it has always been a fight for existence for the smaller birds against the larger marauding types, and periodically permission was given for the destruction of the hawks. Still, to this day, almost every type of wild bird may be found there: the tiny wren nesting in the crevice of an ivy-clad stump and the buzzard aloft on the top of the highest tree.

Years of neglect had resulted in a fairly thick undergrowth and good lying for a fox. But they were seldom good foxes, as it was never necessary to travel far for food in the nature of rabbits, pheasants and poultry; consequently they would generally run from one plantation to another in an unenterprising manner.

Billy calculates that his whips should have reached their respective posts, one at the bottom end, and the other on the main cross ride; then, in response to a wave of his arm and "Eleu in my beauties! Eleu in there!" hounds dash into covert.

Some can now be seen feathering across a ride; soon there is a whimper, but our Master fears that it may be riot, seeing the many excited rabbits scudding across the rides in all directions; then he recognises a reliable note: "Yoic, push him up, old lady. Hoic to, Prudence. Huic, wind him there."

Old Prudence throws her tongue again, and others join in the chorus. Silence once more, and the body of the pack, who have worked into the same quarter of the Shrubbery, again spread themselves out, noses to the ground. A minute later and Ben, the acting first whip, can be heard from one of the main rides: "Huic tally ho—over!"

Billy arrives at this point; three short blasts on his horn and he is cheering his hounds over the ride on to the line which they own without hesitation. In the meantime Ben has cantered on to a more advanced point of vantage. Hounds now hunt their fox round the top end of the wood, while the field stand at the junction of the converging roads, some talking, some smoking; a few, realising they are out to help without interfering, are carefully watching the rides.

Old Potts, whose red neck appears to be bulging over the back of his white stock, looks very warm, and

is busy riding Crusader, who is fresh, short of exercise and sweating freely.

Obviously only a horse with a placid, philosophic temperament would really suit him. At this moment a pheasant crosses the ride in front of him, but as Crusader is fretting and fidgeting, he cannot swear whether it was fur or feather, let alone a fox.

In the meantime hounds have hunted their fox up to the last quarter of the Shrubbery and two couples are outside the covert. But Ben, who is on the spot, has seen nothing, though he cannot be sure that the fox may not have gone away before he reached this point.

What the fox has done is to double back along the extreme edge of the wood, and cross the first of the converging rides too low down to be seen.

Billy, who knows his Shrubbery fox, holds hounds back in covert, and they hunt back again along the far side of the plantation.

Again the fox is viewed, this time on the centre ride by Alfred, who had moved up when he heard hounds speaking in the top quarter. Now there is an increased burst of melody in covert that cheers the hearts of the expectant field. The hounds that were working wide can be seen darting across the rides headlong into the bushes to join in the chorus as they pick up the line. They now hustle their quarry round and round, and the whole woodland re-echoes with their cry. There is a distinct note of venom in the chorus of melody, and if Reynard does not quit his old haunts they will nail him in covert. The more enthusiastic of the field hope they may get him away and have a hunt in the open, but Fate decrees otherwise. Suddenly there is a sort of muffled note as the fox is rolled over in a straggling patch of juniper. He is a great, soft, overfed creature, and all look forward to finding a more enterprising customer elsewhere.

Sir Joseph and Crusader are not hitting it off too well. The high-couraged animal is unaccustomed to heavy hands and a wobbly seat. Still he is too much of a gentleman to show any marked resentment to his rider, who now visibly swells with pride as various members of the field ask him where the Master will draw next.

"Nenethorpe Osiers, to be sure. And I've a good fox waiting for us there," he replies, giving the impression that Buggins the keeper had orders to shake him out of a sack as hounds arrive there, which was not really the case.

Billy, having rapidly broken up his fox, determines not to waste valuable time on a short November day, and jogs on, accompanied by Potts, to the withy bed, which lies on the far side of the river about three hundred yards above the old bridge. It is a nice quiet place, and even in the wettest weather foxes always find good lying there.

At this time of the year the willow boles are that wonderful colour, a mixture of crimson and yellow, which, if any realist was bold enough to depict, by a splash of orange on a green ground, he would be instantly condemned by the critics as absolutely false to Nature.

The field are mustered by the bridge, Ben slips on to the far end of the Osiers, and Billy, with a wave of his arm, puts his hounds into covert. They are barely hidden from view in the mass of yellow when the ringing challenge of two couple of old hounds proclaims a find. He's there all right! "Yuic, roust him up," cheers Billy from his position outside covert, and the volume of music inside is redoubled. Men and horses are alert with keen excitement. A moment later a fine fox breaks away, heading towards the field. Some boys now assembled along the lime avenue start

shouting, and he turns half left, pointing for Chalkpit Bushes. Billy has seen him, and two couples have scrambled over the wet ditch that surrounds the Osiers and are throwing their tongue as they pick up the line in the open. Our Master, as he cannot hope to hold up the two leading couples, is anxious to get the rest all on together, and is now holloaing them away on top of their fox. The leading two couples, who have momentarily checked where the fox turned, are soon joined by the body of the pack, and away they stream, swinging themselves as the fox's line serpentines over the large parkland meadows, like a flock of starlings manœuvring in the sky.

There is a real thrill about a find like this that every fox-hunter knows: cares and worries are instantly dispelled; those who feel they are getting too old for the sport are rejuvenated; men and horses are galvanised into action, and from the way hounds are driving ahead there is no time for indecision.

"Forrard! Forrard! Forrard!" is now the cry.

Look at Crusader, galloping through a gate, eager to carry old Potts anywhere in the wake of hounds! "Why does his master keep such a tight hold on the curb rein?" he asks. Let us have one good stretch of our limbs across this big field so that we can feel the full use of ourselves and know that we can then take on whatever may come.

Unlike his former master, this one rides plumb on the line of hounds. It makes it awkward for both of us. But even if he knew better, we doubt if Potts could do otherwise, his position in the saddle being largely maintained by the reins. As the horse takes a small fence in his stride, he feels the tight curb, and lands with his head in the air as far as his handsome arched neck will permit. Fortunately hounds have got a good start and are running up wind, or Potts might

be riding in the middle of them. In spite of the encumbrance on his back, Crusader is already clear of the rest of the field, and with each stride diminishes the distance between the pair of them and the tail hounds. Old Potts could never be said to lack nerve in the hunting field, especially if one takes his limitations into account. He is now flopping about in his saddle, his little legs occasionally sticking out in front as he sways his body back to get what he calls a feeler of his horse's mouth. At other times, and invariably over the obstacles, his spurs are driven deep into Crusader's flanks. They negotiate the next fence, a cut and laid with real strong binders, at "chasing pace," which lands them in the same field with hounds. Potts feels elated in the belief that he is leading the hunt, but if he does not watch it he will be leading the hounds too. In vain Billy Lines cries out:

"Steady on, please, Sir Joseph—give hounds a chance!"

Notwithstanding their rather uneven appearance, the pack carry a level head, and as long as they run up wind it would take a good horse like Crusader to keep with them.

In spite of his elation, Potts feels that he cannot really manage the horse. He does not actually pull and he thinks he could stop him, but he is so desperately keen, and when once he is opposite a fence he means clearing it. It is just that feeling of being a passenger and the natural dread of getting into trouble that spoil his pleasure. He wishes he had ridden Double Bed—so called because she is so comfortable and confidential that you can't fall off her. Should a man in his position take unnecessary risks on "these 'ere racy, 'ot-'eaded, excitable 'orses"? Before he has time to decide this point, Crusader is over a flight of rails. He has steadied himself and has jumped off his hocks in his

old style, only to be rewarded by a chuck on the mouth from his rider, causing him to land almost on his hind legs.

"I'll teach you to jump big, you blighter," mutters Potts, giving the unfortunate horse another chuck in the mouth in his attempts to regain his equilibrium.

This incident relieves Billy of some anxiety, as Potts loses a few lengths on hounds, who are still racing ahead,

"I'll teach you to jump big, you blighter!"

and at this moment turning left-handed towards the corner of the field. Now they are over the fence into the road beyond, where they check. Billy makes for the gate in the corner, from where he can see his hounds make their own cast.

That dare-devil Potts charges the fence, lands on the road and, as he does so, his horse turns sharp left-handed, pulling up quietly of his own accord short of hounds. How he avoided falling over his horse's off shoulder, he never knows to this day. It was a near thing, and only his grip on the reins and one spur that

stuck in the saddle-flap saved him. It was touch and go: his coat-tails flying over his shoulders and the seat of his white leathers were all that could be seen from behind.

Billy, momentarily catching sight of this incident, subconsciously puts it down to the Grace of God, which passeth all understanding. He calls to his field to "Stand still, please," and getting some of his hounds on each side of the fence bounding the road, casts down it. He hits off the line on the far side, the fox having made, as he expects, for Chalkpit Bushes.

The Duke, who is never absent-minded when hounds are running, asks the field to give hounds a chance, but Crusader, believing his master's ambition is to be with hounds at all costs, pops out of the road almost at a standstill, jumping his master on to his ears as though they were playing leap-frog and Potts had not quite cleared his frog. The horse's fine front enables his rider to slide back into the saddle, though minus a stirrup. "'Ord blast you! Can't you see there's no bloomin' 'urry? I've 'ad enough of this 'ere cup-and-ball game," he protests aloud to his horse, tugging at the reins and gripping tight with his spurs.

Hounds carry the line straight across two grass fields, then through a beech wood, though scent is not so good here as on the grass outside.

Potts finds himself traversing the wood rather less than more of his own free will. He is trying to do so many things at once: steer his horse clear of the tree stems, duck his head from overhanging boughs, catch his hat, now dangling at the end of a string down his back, and trying to regain his lost stirrup—a sort of game of bob-cherry and Aunt Sally all in one. His language, chiefly concerned with "'is —— 'at, 'is —— 'orse, and 'is —— hirons," would have put a bargee to shame. Fortunately he strikes a cart track that

leads uphill through the wood. There is a yokel holding the gate open at the top, and Potts calls on him to hold his horse while he readjusts his equipment. The man says he saw the fox running across the clover seed where the plover are hovering overhead and on straight over the downs towards Morton Trussell. This information is now confirmed by the hounds, but they are dwelling on the line, and scent seems to have become a bit catchy. The wind is getting up, and a pitch-black cloud is blowing up from the north-west.

By the time Potts is ready for action again most of the field have passed him. Little Miss Diana, casting covetous eyes at Crusader, wonders whether Sir Joseph will stick to him now he sees he can't ride him. Soon both come galloping past her again, Crusader stretching his limbs over the sound turf of the downs as though fourteen stone, and that wrongly disposed, was no effort for him to carry.

They are "on and off" a bank as quick as lightning, Potts pocketing his pride and holding on to his saddle fore and aft, with one rein caught in the spur of his right boot. Now they are sailing down-hill where the going is a bit rough, with innumerable mole hummocks scattered about. Sir Joseph remembers vaguely that some king met his death by a fall from his horse over a molehill, and "'opes 'e may be spared sich a 'orrible fate, just when wealth, position and honours 'ad fallen on 'im, has it were, like manna from the 'eavens."

The low, black cloud gets nearer, and there is a sort of yellow light on the downs as it smothers the sun. In a few minutes it is pitch dark, then snow and hail come pelting down and it is bitterly cold. Billy and the Whips try to collect hounds; everyone is lost—at any rate till the sky clears again. Snow in November! No wonder the glass was falling.

Crusader is now standing with his quarters turned

towards the blizzard, his ears laid back and his tail tucked in between his hind-legs.

A farmer beside Sir Joseph says he thinks he knows the way home, and they wander on with their eyes shut, it being much too painful to keep them open in the teeth of the wind, with the hail battering against them like shrapnel bullets. After walking for several minutes they discover that they are back again where they started, but in the meantime everyone else has disappeared.

Potts, anticipating a night on the downs, empties his flask to fortify himself, and they cast about once again for a track the farmer has so far failed to find. This time they are more fortunate, but in the dark they don't know if they struck the track from the east or west, so, although they have found salvation, they cannot avail themselves of it with any great confidence. They decide to turn right-handed, which appears to lead down-hill, as the snow is balling and their horses are stumbling and slipping all over the place.

Gradually the sky brightens, and they find the whole country white and each looking like a snow-man on top of his horse. There is no sign of the other horsemen or of hounds. In any case hunting for to-day is finished, and we doubt whether even a more ardent sportsman than Sir Joseph would have wished to continue the pursuit. The snow is beginning to make itself felt in all sorts of uncomfortable places—inside his leathers and down his back. He vows he will never 'unt again; he is sure Crusader is an onlocky 'orse, but he should have no difficulty in selling him—still, he gave a mint o' money for him!

At last they reach a village, and as it is still snowing, Sir Joseph decides to wait here and telephone for his car to come to the inn.

Unmindful of his horse, he hands him to the man-

of-all-jobs who emerges from the stables as he turns into the yard. He is literally numbed with cold, and walks with difficulty, but in spite of this he pompously gives instructions to the landlord to telephone for his, Sir Joseph Potts', car to come out with his second horseman to enable him and his horse to get home. He was not aware that the latter had also taken shelter at the inn, and was at this moment delighting an interested audience with stories of his master. At intervals he would take a long pull from Sir Joseph's flask, and having finished it he calls for a glass of beer.

"Yes," he is telling them, "you would 'ardly credit the way we does things up at our place. Might be Buckingham Palace. Mr. Vintage, Grum o' the Chamber they calls 'im; Mr. Martingale, Master of the 'Orse."

"And what be you, Mr. Blinkers?" inquires the landlord's daughter, who serves at the bar.

Blinkers' snub nose disappears in his tumbler and then reappears. "Me? I'm something after the style of a Hequerry to His Nibs. He don't do nothing without first asking my advice. In fact 'e's lost without me. Eats out of me 'and." Blinkers relit his cigarette, which magically and gracefully adhered to his upper lip while speaking. "Yes, eats out of me 'and," he repeats. "Shouldn't wonder if the old bounder wasn't lost now without me. In some ways 'e's just like a child."

A chilly blast and hurricane of snow-flakes pours into the room as the man-of-all-work, thrusting a grimy head through the door of the bar, peers through the smoky atmosphere.

"'Ord's sake! shut that door, you pumpkin-'eaded 'eathen!" shouts the equerry.

"Ai," drawls the man. "Ar've coom to tell 'ee your bloke's in yard."

"Crikey!" screams Blinkers, wondering how best to escape, and then bolting for the door, amidst the titterings and guffaws of the occupants of the room.

Fortunately for Blinkers, Sir Joseph, entering by the jug-and-bottle entrance, just missed his invaluable equerry.

Frozen to the marrow, he has consented to change and put on some dry clothes of the landlord's. He stumps across the sawdust-covered floor of the bar parlour, leaving a track of melted snow behind him. With difficulty he lifts his numbed limbs up the narrow staircase to a dark, chilly room, smelling of damp bedding. The walls are ornamented with photographs of bridal groups whose expressions appear to convey funereal solicitude rather than connubial bliss. Attempts to light the fire only succeed in filling the room with suffocating smoke. Sir Joseph, choking and swearing at the fire, struggles out of his wet clothes, exchanging them for the innkeeper's best wedding garments, the same that appear in the photograph hanging over the mantelpiece. When he reappears, he might easily be taken for the proprietor himself, so true is the saying that "clothes make the man"!

Eventually the car arrives, and the second horseman, having been informed of his master's presence in the house, appears with his fur coat and cap and inquires how Crusader carried him. But Potts, feeling somewhat self-conscious in the publican's clothes, is in no mood for conversation, and merely remarks that he isn't quite what he hoped. He makes a dash for his car and shouts "'Ome!" without further considering the welfare of his valuable horse.

On reaching home he discards his coat in the hall and stumps along the passage to his room, where he passes, standing outside a linen cupboard, a pert little

under-housemaid, who mistakes him for the amiable house carpenter.

Flicking him playfully with her duster and getting no response, she remarks:

"My! What a little Johnnie-head-in-air! As perky as Sir Joseph himself!"

Potts makes a dive for his own room, rings for his valet, orders some hot water, whisky, lemon and sugar, lights a cigar and waits for his bath to fill.

Having gulped down a strong hot whisky, he feels on better terms with himself and the world. Like most of us, he thinks over the day's hunting while he smokes his cigar in front of the fire. His thoughts are very different from poor X.'s when he had his great hunt on Crusader. With his toes on the fender, seated in an armchair in his silk dressing-gown, puffing at his cigar, he soliloquises thus:

"Good meet, on the 'ole. Old Vintage and Chef together put up a good show. Must congrat. her Ladyship. She was a bit chippy breakfast time; daresay a bottle of Bubbly and some *crème de menthe* to keep it down will put her right to-night. Wonder which footman that was wot said, when I told him to take some sandwiches to Miss Snowball, 'She's all right, sir, she's on cake'? Sounds like a mare on bran mashes. Can't understand the Duke; is he the liar or is 'is Missis?"

Another drop of whisky, after which he feels more than ever pleased with himself.

"Nice, civil-spoken chap, the Duke. It's men like us wot do so much for English rural life—keep it going, so to speak. Daresay the Duchess is a shy little woman. Shouldn't be surprised if people don't tell her we're a bit proud and stuck up. To-day will show 'em we're simple, though dignified. No doubt about it, she and Mrs. P. should have a lot in common.

Bonnets, bustles, corsets, camisoles and what not—like a couple of school-girls together. There really did ought to be *bonhomie* and friendship between the two ancient 'ouses."

The valet was just coming in at that moment, but hearing the noise of Potts swallowing, and mistaking it for the bath next door being emptied, he decided that it was not necessary to disturb his master while he was dressing. That worthy refilled his empty glass and once more relapsed into a pleasant reverie amidst clouds of smoke, while the ash at the end of his cigar gets longer and longer.

" That Miss Diana admired my riding; I was what you might call leading the van from start to finish. No doubt, though, the 'orse 'as been badly ridden afore 'e came 'ere. Couldn't 'ardly 'ave 'im painted as my favourite 'unter. ' Sir Joseph Potts on 'is old favourite, Crusader.' Fine portrait, no doubt—sounds better, too, than ' Sir Joseph Potts on 'is old favourite, Double Bed.' Just another drop—may as well empty the decanter to stop the drowning sailor."

At this moment the cigar ash dropped on his bare foot. " D—n 'orse must a kicked me ! " he exclaims aloud, shaking his leg and looking down, and at the same time dropping the red-hot cigar on the floor. " Pardon, sir, I 'shure you; my mishtake. Didn't see the red ribbon at first. Might ha' been a nashty accident," he murmurs confidentially, staring inanely at the cigar, now burning a hole in the Turkey carpet. " Rediclush Tumbledown saying hounds seldom run when we smells a fox. I smell one now quite dish-tinkly, and hounds ran like blazes to-day. Steady, Crushader ! Nearly 'ad me hoff sidewise that time." Sir Joseph leant towards the now empty decanter. " Yes, a fearless 'orseman—hic—a little Johnnie—hic—

in air. Two of the—hic, hic—old brigade. The Duke of Potts—hic—and Sir Joseph Tumbledown—hic." With the last " hic " Sir Joseph subsided on to the floor.

. . . . . .

Her Ladyship, dining alone that night, had to cheer her solitude with just a leetle champagne and some *crème de menthe*. Joseph's periodical bouts had always shocked her sense of propriety. If every day's hunting was to end like this, well, she simply couldn't abide it. It was all very well for Joseph to call it " the sport o' kings," " but what about us poor queens ? "

Crusader left the inn in charge of Blinkers, the second horseman, for home, after that gentleman had satisfied his own wants, and although he put down in his bill " Feed for two horses on Wed., 16th Nov., 6*s*.," which reappeared in Mr. Martingale's monthly account as 7*s*., neither horse even smelt an oat of the expensive meals they were supposed to have had.

Blinkers was the type of servant who finds his place in the employ of men like Potts.

For some reason such people seldom have what are called " Gentlemen's servants," no matter what wage they may offer. Quite naturally a good-class servant wishes to serve a good-class master, and a certain mutual respect exists. Blinkers was a bad-class servant, and quite unfit to look after high-class horses.

When eventually Crusader did get home and settled down in his box for the night, he pondered over many things which puzzled his honest brain. He wondered why his present master deprived him of the pleasure he previously derived from a good hunt. Why did he flop about in the saddle when they galloped, putting him out of his stride and upsetting his balance ? Why did he have such a dead pull on his mouth, and at the same time keep irritating him by spasmodic digs of his

spurs all over his flanks and sometimes even on his shoulders? There was no light touch on his mouth or any varying degree of feeling on the reins which he could have understood. Why did he catch him with the bit when he was jumping, sometimes causing so much discomfort that he had to throw up his head to avoid it—in fact once or twice he had landed with a thud on all four legs at once? He really thought he had learnt to land as light as a feather, with his head free to balance himself, and keeping a spare leg ready for emergencies. Now he felt he was clumsy and awkward. Why did his rider appear to get his weight always in the most awkward position for him to jump? Was it his fault that he could never be sure whether he was intended to collect himself or gallop all out? It was all very confusing. There was never any suggestion to steady himself, and once, when he did it of his own accord, he was only rewarded by a chuck on the mouth. Was it really his fault? He thought it must be. He was quite upset about it, and felt that he would never enjoy hunting again. He would probably lose his confidence; perhaps he would even refuse, like he had seen other horses do, just because he had no more reliance in himself. He no longer looked forward to the future. His mouth was sore, and it hurt him to eat. He realised that he was not as fit and hard as he used to be, and he remembered how his old groom and everyone used to say what a wonderful horse he would be when he was a year older. If things went on in this way, he might perhaps become one of those poor hirelings he had seen, or, even worse, one of the Rotten Row riff-raff that he had so despised in London last summer. When he was with his previous master he had been brought up with the idea that he was something quite extra, and was always led

to believe that he would make a name for himself one day. At that time he had been so proud of his vitality, courage and energy. Now it all seemed like a dream. Poor Crusader! Many other horses have thought the same thoughts, have dreamt the same dreams.

CHAPTER VI

RUSHWORTH

When Miss Diana Gibson got back to Rushworth after the snowstorm she was wet to the skin.

She got off her horse in the stables, and stayed a few minutes talking to the old groom, who had known her since childhood, when her Aunt Mary appeared on the scene and packed her off instantly to change her wet clothes.

Lady Mary Standish was a great personality in the county. She was a widow, and, as her father and mother had died some ten years ago without any son, she came into the place and property, together with a very considerable income. She was an extremely capable person, and it would be well-nigh impossible to find an estate or a house better run than hers. She remembered how her father and mother had been respected and beloved by all, and she was determined that Rushworth should not lose its prestige and good name while she reigned there.

It was a charming old red-brick house, built about 1700. Immediately a stranger entered he could not fail to be impressed by the obvious good taste and extreme comfort that existed throughout.

For generations the Rushworths had been Masters of the pack that still retained their name. It was not until several years after the death of the late Earl, the last of the male line, that the kennels were moved from Rushworth to a more central position in the country.

Will Drake, huntsman for twenty years, and his master had been a very exceptional combination. Will loved his hounds first of all, and next to them his master and mistress. Mrs. Drake, his wife, used to say there were two Wills: one when his hounds had killed their fox, and he would be all smiles; the other when he had lost his fox, which he always attributed to his own fault or the folly of one of his whips. He was then a different man. There were no smiles, nor was even the suspicion of a smile allowed down at the kennels or in his own house. Poor Mrs. Drake would try in vain to make him eat his supper, but how could a man who had deprived his hounds of blood do aught but deny himself his own dinner?

His affection for his master and the family came next. When the former was too old to attend the more distant meets, Will would come in and tell him full details of the hunt, and, between them, they would fill in the diary, which included the detailed performances of each hound throughout the various stages of the hunt.

By this means the old gentleman, when he had entirely given up hunting, could still describe in the most minute way the character of each of his hounds. He was an accepted authority on all hunting lore, and unsurpassed as a judge of horse or hound.

Will's affection for his mistress showed itself in this way. Although he would appear to be solely absorbed in his hounds, he would glance round to make sure that her Ladyship was what he called "handy" and enjoying herself, and in her later years Will was always on the look out to help her. Probably the only time that she was ever separated from her husband was on one occasion when Will had a bad accident and his master hunted the hounds. Lady Rushworth then took the Drake family abroad herself, as the doctor

said that Will would recuperate more rapidly at some Continental health resort. She established them safely there, came home, and later returned to bring them back. During Will's convalescence abroad he was kept regularly informed of each day's hunting and of the individual achievements of each hound.

He continued to hunt hounds up to the time of his master's death, when they changed hands, there being no male descendant of the family to take them on, and Will found himself comfortably pensioned, with a horse always kept at his disposal as long as he should wish to ride out and see hounds hunting.

Needless to say, the traditions of the house were kept up by Lady Mary after the death of her parents.

An amusing story is told of these delightful old people: how on one occasion they went to stay with an equally charming old couple, and one night, after the ladies had retired to bed, the two old gentlemen sat late, discussing horses and hounds. Eventually they both retired to their dressing-rooms. Later the guest walked down the passage to what he believed was his wife's room, entered, and noticed her apparently kneeling by the bed saying her prayers. He then crept quietly into what he believed to be his wife's, but was really his hostess's, bed, and was just dozing off, when in came his host. The explanations were so quietly and tactfully made that no one in the dear old quartette was perturbed by this singular incident.

The old Rushworths had been quite inseparable all their lives. They believed—and probably rightly in their case—that neither could be happy or enjoy anything unless the other participated in it. And so they shared each pleasure, which redoubled its charm, and each sorrow, which through mutual sympathy lost much of its bitterness. "Jam veniet tacito curva senecta

pede." Though a healthy life may stave off old age, merciless time cannot indefinitely be denied. Hand in hand through life together, they grew old, loved and respected by all. They represented all that was best in a bygone generation; feudal by instinct, yet recognising the rights of their dependants, to whom their generosity and sympathy were unlimited. Though a grand seigneur, the old Earl's tastes were so simple, and his courtesy was so universal, that the affection of his retainers was positively filial. The present-day cry —the debasement of private service as opposed to factory work—would indeed have bewildered these good people. Their simple minds would have failed to appreciate the subtle difference between dependence on an industrial concern and dependence on a single good master, with whose family they and their forbears had worked for generations.

However, it was not until both had reached a ripe old age, when his wife died, that the dear old gentleman was forced to bear his last great sorrow alone. Of late years, when unable to walk much over his estate, he was still able to get about on his old hack. During the latter part of his life he would ride across the park to church each Sunday, a picturesque figure in his top hat, starched high collar and bow tie, frock coat and overalls, now long out of fashion. He only survived his wife by five days, when he was borne by the same tenants who had carried her to their last resting-place in the family cemetery in Rushworth Park. His spirit passed away, and with it a landmark and link with the last century disappeared.

Though Diana, as we may now call her as acquaintance blossoms into friendship, barely remembered her grandparents, she spent so many months of the year with her aunt that she almost looked on the place as her home.

To-night at dinner she was recounting to Lady Mary the incidents of the day's hunting, which for generations had been one of the traditions of the house. After a pause she said :

" Do you remember the horse I was so anxious that 'Pauper' should buy for me? Poor old darling, he did his best to get it ! "

" Yes, I remember. You told me about it," replied her aunt. " You were very scathing about Sir Joseph at the time."

" Well, old Potts was out on him to-day, and if he rides him much more he'll be ruined. Poor Crusader was trying to do his best, but was worried to death the whole time. Do you know," Diana nodded her pretty head to emphasise the prediction, " I have a feeling that I shall get him myself before the end of the season ! "

Lady Mary raised her eyebrows in surprise.

" But, my dear, surely you don't propose to pay that enormous price for a horse that may be permanently spoilt ? "

" No, but I have a feeling that if one wants a thing fearfully badly, if one only wants it enough, one can get it." She turned two pleading blue eyes towards her aunt. " But you will have to help me, darling, to carry out my plan."

Her aunt smiled indulgently.

" But even if I helped you to buy him, I think it would be foolish to give a very big price—in the first place more than I could afford, and secondly much too much of a gamble at the figure Sir Joseph Potts would accept for him.

" No ! No ! I'd never dream of asking you for that sort of help, you darling, but I love you for even thinking of it. No, listen ; it's like this. You've never called on Lady Potts—I know you haven't ? Well,

now you must harden your heart and do it." This clever little psychologist with the face of an angel, having appreciated the Potts' mentality, then proceeded to disclose her plan. "Do you know," she continued, "I believe he'll sell the horse to me at my price if he thinks you're likely to call afterwards!"

Lady Mary was evidently horrified at her niece's suggestion, and the shocked expression on her face would certainly have embarrassed a less determined minx than Diana.

"But, my dear child," she protested, "I am sure no one values my acquaintance at five hundred pounds; the idea's preposterous! Of course, I would do anything for you, my dear; but I feel now it would be positively dishonest if I were to call on them. It would lie heavily on my conscience ever afterwards!"

Lady Mary hoped that this frank expression of her own feelings would crush her niece's audacious proposal, but far from it:

"My dear, beloved aunt," laughed Diana, "your precious little conscience needn't come into the question. Old Potts paid gratuitously for his knighthood, and it won't be your fault if he likes to pay for your acquaintance. Besides," she added persuasively, stretching out a graceful white arm to lower the shade of one of the candlesticks on the table, "it will really make them both happy, and you always say you're sorry for her. You've just got to leave it to me. I am the keeper of my own conscience, and I promise not to sully 'Pauper's' good name. It will make him happy too, because he was genuinely sad that he couldn't buy Crusader for me. And by the time you've made me happy on top of it all, my darling Aunt Sancta Maria, well, it must be a perfectly glorious feeling doing so much good in the world in one fell swoop." Diana felt she had gained a point, and paused before issuing

her final instructions. "So just leave everything to me, and go and pay a nice little call *chez* Potts when I tell you!" The expression of her blue eyes, though pleading, was not unmingled with confidence, nor could Lady Mary help smiling at her niece's persuasiveness.

"Well, Diana, I suppose the young people of to-day always get their own way, though it is very bad for them. I will call on them when you tell me to, though for the first time in my life I shall feel positively nervous about calling upon someone!"

"That's a bargain—and you're a darling!" cried Diana, getting up and planting a kiss on both her aunt's cheeks.

With that the conversation changed to other topics, and Diana went to bed and dreamt that she was riding Crusader in a hunt where hounds were running alongside the railway line, level with an express train. They were jumping canals, railway crossings and every imaginable fence that crossed their path; even the express train could not live with them. She had just cleared the Rushworth deer-park palings when hounds ran into their fox on the lawn. Her maid came in at that moment and pulled up the blinds.

"Oh," exclaimed Diana, waking up and stretching out her arms, "isn't he a darling? And to think he's my very own!"

This was the origin of the rumour amongst the servants that Miss Diana would soon be getting married. Some said it was Captain Spurrier, some thought it might be young Lord Elmtree, others hoped it was her cousin, Master Richard. Then there were discussions as to whether she would be allowed to marry her cousin, but, as the old housekeeper assured them, "There was no objection to second cousins; and whoever it was he would be a very lucky young man, and she, for

one, only hoped he would be worthy of their Miss Diana!"

During the next few days each possible suitor became a hot favourite, not that there was any actual betting amongst these respectable family servants, still, the pros and cons in connection with the subject afforded the main topic of conversation downstairs. First of all Spurrier, who motored over to lunch with his two greyhounds to course in the Park, was considered the good thing. Then Elmtree, who came and stopped over-night for the next day's pheasant shooting, was declared to be a certainty. Metaphorically, he was odds on after luncheon. In the first place, Diana sat next to him at lunch, and at the subsequent beat (the Larches) the best of the day she stood beside him. They were wonderfully high birds and just turning as they came over, but Elmtree, who was a first-rate shot, was killing them with such precision and ease that it was bound to tell in his favour, and poor Spurrier's price lengthened out considerably. Then, as is generally the case in ante-post betting on big events, another probable starter supplanted Elmtree. This occurred when Lady Mary read out a letter from Dick one morning at breakfast. He proposed coming with five horses to Rushworth for his two months' winter leave. If Cousin Mary (as he called her) did not mind, he would send the horses down a week before he came himself, and if Diana was short—and he hoped she was not—she could ride Duchess. As a matter of fact she would ride any of them much better than he. In any case his leave would not start for another fortnight, but he knew she, Cousin Mary, would like to have an early warning, and he was writing to ask Will to let him know what forage he could buy locally from the farmers.

"Yes, it will be simply glorious!" declared Diana

enthusiastically. "Though I couldn't be happier than I am, Aunt Mary. But one does enjoy hunting all the more with one's particular friends."

By the time this information, thanks to his letter to Will, had circulated to the servants' hall, Dick had so many supporters that he was a hot favourite before the day was over. All the older servants began reminiscing on his previous visits to Rushworth. The butler remembered him shooting his first rabbit, that was stalked early one morning round the big rhododendron bed. The head housemaid remembered brushing his hair for dinner one night, when he suddenly bobbed his head up, caught her on the nose and made it bleed. The lady's maid remembered getting him up to play the part of "Bubbles" for Pears' Soap in some charades. The housekeeper remembered him at a very early age being lost for two hours in the park. When he eventually did get home, with the impression that he had been away for ages, and finding that no one had apparently noticed his long absence, he plaintively called attention to the fact by remarking, "I see old Meg (the water spaniel) still remembers me."

These and many other episodes were recounted by these worthy people, each being ready with his or her contribution when it came to their turn. The secret of Diana's engagement was kept by the simple means of everyone knowing about it except herself!

Lady Mary wrote back by return of post to say she was delighted; everything would be ready for him, and she hoped he would stay as long as he liked.

A week later Master Richard's horses were installed at Rushworth, to the delight of the old stud-groom, who fondly remembered the days when his master's and all the hunt horses had been stabled there.

CHAPTER VII

"THE FOUR FIDDLERS"

It was about a week later when the Rushworth Hounds were to meet at the "Four Fiddlers" Inn at Gressington, about three miles from Rushworth.

It was a much-favoured meet, in the middle of the vale, and there was always a large attendance. It meant drawing some of the Rushworth coverts, all sure finds, and a hunt over the best part of the country.

Colonel Brian, who was Master of this pack, was a capital sportsman. He had endeavoured to keep the pack up to their previous standard of excellence, and though Jack Welch, his huntsman, was young and without great experience, he was exceedingly keen. Old Will, who still came out, would, in the most tactful way, occasionally offer his valuable assistance, of which both master and huntsman would gladly avail themselves.

Little Gressington, as opposed to Great Gressington, was the larger village of the two, with an extensive green in the middle, and possessing three shops, a saddler, a blacksmith and a grocer, in addition to the "Four Fiddlers"; whereas the greater Gressington, half a mile off, though including a church and rectory, exhibited no commercial enterprise. In fact it was looked upon as a one-horse place compared with its go-ahead brother. Though Major and Minor Gressington have grown old in years, neither has grown in size during the last century. The commercial activity

of the younger brother is due to the fact that it was at one time on the old coach road, and the "Four Fiddlers" was a coaching inn where horses were changed and unfortunate travellers failed to get a meal. In those days two yew trees, fashioned in the form of fantail pigeons, adorned the portals of this ancient hostelry. They are there to-day, but, owing to the care and attention of successive proprietors, they have since assumed the proportion and appearance of two handsome peacocks with outspread tails, the joy and pride of their present owner. As no railway replaced the coach route through Little Gressington, progress ceased, and if there is any increase in its population it is in no way apparent, as no new houses exist. Presumably the surplus population is drawn to the large towns, with their cinemas and other attractions.

This morning, however, the village is all agog with excitement, just as it used to be when the stage-coach pulled up at the tavern door. Straw is put down in the boxes, and second horsemen who have come from some distance are sheltering their horses there and rubbing the mud-specks off legs and stomachs. The school children have evidently got a holiday, as the schoolmaster, who is also the organist at Great Gressington, is out on his cob. He is an ardent foxhunter, and is fortunate in having a most capable daughter, who acts as locum tenens whenever hounds are near enough for her father to get out.

Foxhunters keep turning up from all directions; some riding, some in motor cars—all our friends who were out at Kingsmede and many more.

Here come the hounds, pitter-pattering down the road to the village green, where they stop. A very nice level lot, bright and in good condition, with their sterns carried well up. Old Rushworth would be

pleased if he could see them, and Will, who is out, finds strong traces of resemblance to his master's old hounds, whose blood lives to-day in the present pack. They have all full bone, straight legs and rounded feet, fine necks and sloping shoulders, deep chests, good ribs and loins. Young Welch is indeed lucky to have the care and hunting of such hounds, and no wonder he is keen!

Colonel Brian is talking to Diana, but something for a moment has distracted her attention; it is the arrival of Sir Joseph in his luxurious limousine. Will he be riding Crusader again? She loses sight of him as he disappears into the inn stables, and when he comes out again he is mounted on a brown he calls "Henterprise." Her heart sinks when she realises he may already have sold Crusader. She is pretty sure he has not ridden him since the last time she saw him. Then, to her delight, she sees Blinkers on him. But there is no more time for cogitation; the Master, who has just been talking to old Will, tells the huntsman to move off and draw Gressington Gorse, and away they jog at that half-walk, half-trot pace that only hounds appreciate.

The Gorse is on the north side of the village, on the slope of a hill about three-quarters of a mile back from the road through bridle gates. With such a big field, and many of them belonging to two other hunts, the Master will have his work cut out to get hounds a fair chance to-day, unless there is a good scent. The drops hanging on the hedgerows and the blue mist still lying over the fields are not happy indications. At any rate, Gressington Gorse is a pretty sure find, so we must hope for the best. Welch puts hounds into covert down-wind, mindful of the fact that they chopped a fox in here last season, while horses and riders are

shepherded in the field along one side of the gorse. It is none too easy a place from which to get a fox away, owing to the density of the furze.

The huntsman walks into the middle of the covert, cracking his whip, cheering and exhorting his hounds to get their fox afoot. There is surely one here, and yet hounds have not opened. At last a single note! "Yoic, push him up there!" cries Welch. The fox has been lying low, with his ears pricked to catch the sound of approaching hounds, and sniffing the air apprehensively. He can see little from where he is, but all his senses are alert. He hopes they may pass him by, and if he keeps still they may not get near enough to catch his scent. But old Traveller, forcing his way under and through the thick gorse like a retriever following a wounded bird, comes to within a few yards down-wind of the fox and throws his tongue.

"Eleu in! Try over there, my beauties! Try over there!" cries the huntsman.

A fresh note is added to that of Traveller's, which is again confirmed by Rasper.

"Yeuic, roust him up! Yoic! Push him up there!" cheers the huntsman, but there is still no very definite cry in covert.

The fox is convinced that unless they can press him he is pretty safe to remain in the thick gorse, where he is at any rate out of view.

But now he's afoot, and whimpers increase to full-tongued melody. See how the furze quivers! And between intermittent notes the sound of many pattering feet can be heard on the brown, rain-sodden bracken underfoot.

The whips, watching the flanks of the gorse, stand erect in their stirrups, expecting any minute to view the fox slipping quietly away from the covert. Again hounds are at check, and several couples can now be

seen in the top end, their sterns bristling midst the thick gorse and broom. Doubtless the fox has turned back under the far bank. There is evidently very little scent in covert, apparently none where the broom predominates, and even twenty couple of busy hounds fail to push him out. Then Welch's eager eye views him across a narrow ride.

"Huic, tally-ho! Huic, tally-ho!" Three sharp blasts on his horn, and half the pack are close on Reynard's brush; yet there is an obvious pause before they own the line, then suddenly they open, throwing their tongues with more confident cry. The fox turns right-handed again, and then decides he had better try his luck in the open. He is holloaed away at the top end of the covert, which is so dense and difficult for hounds to traverse that he secures a good start before Welch gets his pack settled down on the scent. Even in the open they can make little of it, and the field coming round the end of the gorse are already pressing on hounds, who diligently work out the line across the next two fields and then throw up their heads.

Welch watches hounds swing themselves, and possibly remembering the late Lord Willoughby de Broke's advice to huntsmen, he makes the famous Tom Smith's cast. First he holds them back left-handed up-wind, without result, then a little wider cast right-handed, finally executing a still wider left-handed cast, selecting the best scenting ground, which enables hounds again to hit off the line where the fox scrambled through a big bull-finch.

The huntsman jumps the fence after his hounds, and the field, now in two phalanxes, take up their positions opposite the only two jumpable places. There is not much to choose, as both are unpleasant and scratchy, and everyone has to wait his turn. Brian, the

Duke, Archie Languid and two strangers are over, only to pull up as hounds make their own cast where scent has again failed. Diana pops over on Wisdom, but tears her veil in doing so.

Then Lucifer and Minstrel, two reliable old hounds who are convinced that their fox is not on, cast back and hit off the scent under the fence. They are joined by the remainder, and together they work out the line on the lee side of the hedge. Unfortunately, just in front of their noses a stout man on a brown horse lands over the bull-finch, to be justly chided by the Master. It is Sir Joseph, who, more by luck than judgment, escapes killing any hounds. It is an anxious moment for all concerned, especially the unfortunate hounds. Colonel Brian's well-deserved censure strikes home, and though Sir Joseph looks sheepish and heated, he can scarce refrain from making some reference to the magnitude of his subscription, as though that gave him a right to jump on hounds. Why, the Meltonians in Osbaldeston's time frequently did the same thing! Fortunately he overcomes his natural inclination; wisdom triumphs over arrogance, and he makes his apologies. The pack hunt on at a walking pace for two more fields, when a man is seen calling in his dog. The latter comes back shamefaced and panting, and although his owner has not seen the fox, it is more than likely that the dog has!

With a foiled line and scent now having entirely evaporated on the fallow, Welch has no alternative but to lift hounds, and although he makes all his ground good, they never own the line again and the hunt peters out.

The next covert, a doubtful find, is drawn blank, and even the more optimistic are inclined to fear that they are in for a disappointing day. It is now after one o'clock, and the second horsemen begin to make

their appearance. Blinkers, carrying an enormous flask and sandwich case, arrives on Crusader and asks whether Sir Joseph is ready to change. At first the great man hesitates, but after emptying his flask he decides that he will. Perhaps a day like this might be less risky, as there does not appear to be any likelihood of a hunt. He bids Blinkers "Bring Crusader alongside o' this 'ere mole-'ill," on which he is standing, to enable him to mount the more easily. "Woa, 'oss! Woa, Crusader! Stop your himpetuosity, blast you!" he exclaims as his foot slips out of the stirrup and the first effort fails. The next try, however, with a well-timed, helpful push from Blinkers, he hoists himself into the saddle, gathers up his reins and thrusts his feet home in the stirrups.

In the meantime Colonel Brian gives orders to go to Oakland Wood, where at any rate they will find a fresh fox, even though hounds may not be able to hunt him unless scent improves.

As everyone knows, scent is a deceptive thing: sometimes hounds will run under conditions generally considered most unfavourable; then they may change from one fox they cannot hunt at all on to another that they may run into after a twenty minutes' burst.

As they jog on to the covert the wind changes, and there appears to be a nip in the air. Only old Potts and his horse look hot. Crusader, still thinking of the last day's hunting, is wondering if he can get on better with his master this time.

They arrive at the covert side, and as Welch puts his hounds in, a flock of pigeons, with their wings flapping among the bare branches, flies out at the far end.

"Eleu in there! Eleu in, try!" cries Welch, and a flustered jay, flitting from tree to tree, answers back in harsh, cackling tones which are soon drowned in the

harmonious music of many tongues. No hesitating whimpers preceded their cry. First one deep note, then another, then a crash of melody, and now their clarion notes re-echo through the wood. No, there is no lack of confidence now, and hounds impetuously push their fox through the brambles and undergrowth to the far corner of the covert. A whip's shrill holloa rends the air, proclaiming that he is already away.

"Forrard away—forrard away—forrard!" followed by Welch's horn, confirms the fact, and the field, only a few minutes ago so disconsolate, are now in raptures of delight.

If one may judge by the cry and drive of hounds in covert, it looks like a real good thing, and there is no time to waste.

Which is the best way—down the ride through the wood, or round by the gates on the sounder turf outside? Hesitation certainly entails being left. Some make up their minds to go one way, some the other, while a large number have their minds made up for them and are carried along by the charging mass of horsemen.

Little Diana, with an eye to the main chance, calls out, "This is the best way, Sir Joseph!" and up the ride they gallop. Though she may be able to show Sir Joseph the way, it is not such an easy matter to show Crusader, who has forgotten all his forebodings and only wants to get near hounds. He gallops through a half-open gate at the end of the ride, throwing the mud behind him and wrecking any desire Sir Joseph may have entertained of keeping the gate from swinging on his fair companion. However, Diana is quite capable of looking after herself, and follows in the track of Crusader, who unwittingly has assumed the rôle of pilot.

Hounds are racing ahead, and it looks as if most of the field will soon be out of this hunt.

Crusader has come to the conclusion that to-day, at any rate, his owner evidently wants him to jump in "chasing style." He feels Messrs. Maxwell's best silver-plated spurs digging into his flanks, as, with their aid, old Potts clutches on like grim death, at the same time taking a good strong hold of his horse's head.

"Good-'ord! If only I'd known that we was in for a 'unt I'd a-stuck to old Henterprise instead of this 'ere racy blighter. 'E's wuss than a eel over the fences," he mutters to himself as the horse takes a small grip, half-way across the field, in his stride.

They are now careering over a perfect grass country, real sound turf and easy fly fences. Fortunately hounds got away well ahead of them, as they are going a rare gallop, though the pace is too much for Potts. It's the pace that kills both man and horse, and he is blowing and getting more and more shaky in his saddle. It is highly probable that, if he had stood up in his stirrups and kept his heels away from his horse's sides, he would readily have come back to his hand, but whatever his unhappy master instinctively does in his efforts to keep his seat is interpreted by Crusader as further demands on his speed. Now there is a stiff flight of rails with a big blind ditch on the take-off side, and as Diana watches him go at it full tilt, she feels sure that it will be her unfortunate fate to pick up the bits. But no! Crusader stands back so far that it seems impossible he can clear the lot. He does, however, to the extreme discomfiture of Potts, who is as nearly jumped off as "makes no matter."

They swing left-handed away from him as he lands over the next fence in the same field with hounds, which unfortunately is sown with winter oats.

"'Ware wheat!" shouts the Master. "I wish people would recognise a sown field," he grunts to himself, but his chiding is "as vain as the Norseman's rebuke of the sea!" Old Potts either can't hear or can't pull up; at all events he appears oblivious to the fact that he is doing any damage. Admittedly the damage is more to the feelings of the owner of the land than to the actual crop, except late on in the season if there is much rain, when the seedlings rot in the water-logged hoof-marks.

He has caught his flushed face in a bramble at the last fence, and the blue blood of the Potts is flowing freely over his white stock. It was just as well that hounds did turn left-handed, or he would have been in the middle of them by now; as it is, he is pretty wide on their flank. Crusader, remembering his former master's method of riding on the flank of hounds, feels more at his ease, and, though irritated with the burden he has to carry, settles to a steadier pace. They come sailing down to the brook which hounds have just crossed a little higher up. It is one of those obstacles where you have to select your place very carefully, as in most parts it is quite unjumpable. If you don't happen to know the right spot you must ride down first and have a look, as, besides being wide, the banks are overhanging at many points.

It was Potts' misfortune to strike one of these traps. As Crusader takes off, the earth crumbles away beneath his hind legs, and in spite of a courageous effort, he breasts the far bank with a thud. Potts is thrown up in the air with the shock and falls back with a splash into the river, where for a few seconds he is completely submerged. In the meantime Crusader has struggled half-way up on to the far bank, and with a last plunge he scrambles out.

Diana and Captain Spurrier are over a little higher

up. The latter, cursing himself for being a good Samaritan, pulls up and turns back to the assistance of the unfortunate Potts, still struggling to reach dry land out of five feet of mud and water. Diana hesitates for

She volunteers to hold Spurrier's horse.

a few seconds, and then—whether it is due to sheer kind-heartedness or to a fixed determination not to lose a chance of securing Crusader, we shall never know—she also draws rein and comes to the poor millionaire's assistance.

She volunteers to hold Spurrier's horse while the latter casts with his whip over Potts' head in an endeavour to pull him out. The first cast gets carried down the stream and Sir Joseph misses it. "The devil's a cannibal and won't rise to a fly," murmurs Spurrier

"Damn! rose short that time."

brutally. At the next attempt Sir Joseph manages to catch the thong of Spurrier's whip, but it slides through his slippery wet gloves and down he sinks, disappearing from view in a storm of infuriated splutters. "D—n! rose short that time," exclaims the enthusiastic angler, though still far from disheartened, and casting again.

The third effort is successful: Potts, gasping and gurgling, rises like a hungry trout to a May-fly. Spurrier plays him to the bank and, turning to Diana with a grin, whispers, "I don't know now how we're going to land him without a gaff. Regular sixty-pounder on this little rod." He heaves with all the zest of a tug-o'-war team. Sometimes Potts looks like winning, then Spurrier gains a yard or so. At the critical moment he nearly slips, and would undoubtedly have joined Sir Joseph in the water if Diana had not, with great presence of mind, jumped off her horse caught him by the coat-tail and thus enabled him to regain his foothold. After a desperate struggle poor old Potts, covered with black mud, is landed on his stomach. For some minutes he is too exhausted to offer any thanks to his rescuers, who stand panting and flushed with excitement, like two triumphant anglers admiring their record catch. Then his eye lights bitterly on Crusader, who stands shivering beside the other two horses.

"I'm afraid you must be freezing, Sir Joseph. I can't understand your horse falling there," says Diana, attempting to be sympathetic and diplomatic at the same time.

"Well, you two've saved my life, and I thanks you both, but as for that rotten brute, I'll give him away," coughs Sir Joseph, vainly endeavouring to look dignified with his much-abused hat, now festooned with a garland of dirty weeds, perched on the back of his head.

"At least, when I says I'll give 'im away, I'd take five hundred quid—only about 'alf wot I gave for him! He's not a gentleman's 'orse. The chap I bought 'im off ought to be 'ung."

He then proceeded to wring out his ears, and according to Spurrier's account, though possibly exaggerated, three wriggling minnows and a fresh-water shrimp fell

out on the grass, whence they were replaced in the stream by the kind-hearted Miss Gibson.

"Well, if you can jump up again I advise you to get home as soon as you can," suggests Spurrier.

Potts, with chattering teeth and chilled to the marrow, groaningly consents to this, and, not without difficulty, is hoisted on to his horse, and they make for the road through a succession of gates. Later they meet someone who tells them that hounds ran into their fox in the allotment gardens after a desperate, fast twenty-five minutes. At the next cross-roads they each take their respective turns for home, Spurrier inwardly cursing Potts for preventing him seeing the end of the hunt, Potts cursing Crusader for giving him a ducking, and Diana hoping that Fate has been kind to her and that she will eventually get the horse she has set her heart on.

CHAPTER VIII

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

When Diana got back that evening she recounted the events of the day to her aunt, though she did not go deeply into the details of Potts' last remarks. After dinner she wrote as follows to Sir Joseph:

"Dear Sir Joseph,

"I trust you are none the worse for your nasty toss.

"I have been thinking over what you said, namely, that you would sell the horse for half what you gave for him. I suppose he is really not up to your weight, and quite understand your not wanting to keep a horse under these conditions. I wish I could afford to buy him, as he would be well up to mine. Unfortunately, I can't afford to give more than £375, but I would gladly give this on the chance that he might suit me.

"My aunt is looking forward to coming over one day soon to call on Lady Potts, and I hope to accompany her.

"Yours sincerely,

"Diana Gibson."

She put the letter into an envelope, stamped it and sent it down to catch the early post.

When Sir Joseph received this offer the following

day, the price £375 so horrified his commercial mind that his first idea was to throw it into the fire. On second thoughts he read it again, showed it to his wife, and watched her face closely while she absorbed the contents: upon which, after a reflective pause, she commented:

"I think it would be a pity to refuse her the horse, seeing as how he's not up to your weight, Joseph. Besides——"

"But I'm not one to part with a blood 'orse at that price," snaps her spouse.

"No, I know; but I think the whole family would appreciate your generosity, my dear!"

"Wot, drop a monkey? Not I!" grunts Sir Joseph, Diana's offer still rankling in his mind.

"Reely, Joseph, I can't abide these common expressions. It's that obnoxious Mr. Hiels you got that from! I never did hold with your keeping company with him."

"Poor old 'Airy 'Eels! 'E's done me a good turn before now, though he did buy this quad. Not his fault, perhaps; it's that damned fellow X. I blame. Talk about 'im being a 'orseman—all tommy rot and 'umbug! Why, I'd back 'Airy against 'im any day, even if he 'ad to ride a towel-'orse bare-backed."

"Reely, Joseph, I beg of you!" exclaims her Ladyship, apparently scandalised at the thought of Mr. Hiels as a nude equestrian. She firmly believed, and not without reason, that this gentleman had a demoralising influence over her husband.

While the latter continued to shake with laughter at his own delicate *double entendre*, her Ladyship pursued the subject in what she considered a supremely tactful manner.

"Well, Joseph, what I say is this. It's no use a lady arguing the point with a strong, impulsive man like

you, but far from your title impoverishing you, as you thought at one time it might, it's brought you position and increased wealth. Now, with this here five hundred you and I have the chance of establishing ourselves in the cream of society. It's all very well for you to go gallivanting about the country in scarlet, leaving me at home dressed up, hoping against hope for callers. Not forgetting your bilious attack after last day's hunting." In spite of her efforts to be tactful, Lady Potts could not resist this delicate allusion to the *finale* of the Kingsmede meet, when she had dined in solitary grandeur. "As I reads between the lines, this wretched horse is worth his weight in solid gold. You hold the *entrée* to Rushworth in the palm of your hand, so to speak." Her Ladyship paused for breath, and appeared to be scanning the letter over again. In reality she was considering a more laudable motive with which to conclude her argument. "Let the girl have the horse, Joseph. Open-handed generosity has its own reward; not that I want to persuade you one way or another, dearie, but if you was to ask my advice, I wouldn't hesitate for a moment."

Sir Joseph's mind had really traversed the same path as her Ladyship's, and he was only waiting to have his own views confirmed. After a little more face-saving bluster he capitulated to his helpmeet.

"Well, mother, you women always 'ave the last word!"

"Mother" was his one term of endearment for his wife, and by no means inferred sarcasm or reproach for her failure to produce an heir to the Potts millions.

He sat down at his desk and selected a suitable shade and size of note-paper, with the De la Pourt arms and crest inscribed thereon, and commenced to write:

"DEAR MISS GIBSON,

"Your letter of 18th inst. received to-day.

"I must confess I hardly intended to sell Crusader at this early stage, till I had a chance of putting him to rights. But as you seem sweet on the horse and he is hardly up to my weight, I am prepared to sell him for the price you suggest. At the same time I would not like the responsibility of selling the horse without you came over and had a ride on him. Though business engagements may prevent me having the pleasure of welcoming you here, nevertheless, I assure you that Lady Potts will be most happy to do the honours of Kingsmede whenever you and the Lady Mary Standish may make it convenient to come over.

"Believe me, yours sincerely,
"JOSEPH POTTS."

He then called to his wife:

"I'm not sure whether this letter going to Lady Mary's niece didn't ought to be sealed with our coat-of-arms. Look it up in 'Social Etiquette,' mother."

But though that invaluable little manual contained the most useful information upon almost every conceivable contingency, it, alas! threw no light on this extremely delicate point.

"Try 'Correspondence,'" suggests Sir Joseph.

"I have, dear, and I don't see nothing about it," answers Lady Potts, frenziedly scanning the directions as to the proper mode of addressing Royalties, Dignitaries of the Church, Lord Chancellors, younger sons of Marquesses, Baronets, Knights, Knights Bachelors and all the perplexing gradations of our social order. "No, there isn't no mention of when to seal letters anywhere."

"Try under 'Seal,' then."

The Lord Privy Seal appearing under this heading only adds to the perplexity.

"Customs and Conventions," which covers a large field, is equally devoid of useful information.

Paying and Returning Calls, Invitations, Introductions, Crests and Armorial Bearings on Carriages and Motors, Correct Method of Saluting a Lady in Public, even the intimate details of Proposal, Acceptance and Refusal of Marriage, and the Breaking Off an Engagement, are each dealt with, but alas! there is nothing relating to the subject in question.

"Well, I think it would be nice the first time of writing, Joseph. It can't do no harm."

"Yes, I reckon you're right, and we could drop it on closer acquaintance. I always says first himpressions are lasting. There ain't no manner of doubt but what we'd make a good impression by haffixing the De la Pourt crest and coat-of-arms this time; it looks what I calls more dignified, what the French call 'distangey.'"

"Yes, dearie, it do look more dignified—more so as it's got a nice simple letter inside from one friend to another."

So it is decided, and after destroying several envelopes in the attempt, a perfect impression of the De la Pourt coat-of-arms, crest, quarterings and motto is produced on a large wad of red sealing-wax, and the letter is posted.

"It's just these little finenesses that really matter in life," remarks her Ladyship, with a sigh of relief after reaching this weighty decision.

When Diana awoke next morning, this flamboyant piece of heraldry lay on the tray with her tea. She was wide awake in an instant, and as she read the contents her spirits soared heavenward. The maids, hearing her singing in her bath, put this early morning gaiety

down to the much-discussed love affair. Perhaps the tea-leaves in her cup had foretold a wedding with a dark man sailing across the water. Telling the future by tea-leaves in a cup is a domestic science that is not yet fully appreciated by the many.

By breakfast time all arrangements were made, and Lady Mary was held to her bargain. In fact it was a foregone conclusion that resistance would be useless.

Diana had ordered the car to take them to Kingsmede

Crusader.

after lunch, with her saddle to be put on the seat by the chauffeur. She telephoned to "Pauper" to say that she would buy the horse, and asked him to send her a cheque. As it was twenty-five pounds more than he said he could possibly run to, she was glad to say she could make up the difference out of her own allowance.

That afternoon she and her aunt drove up to the door of Kingsmede, where they were received by Vintage and two minor officials of the household.

"Is Lady Potts at home?" and the answer being in the affirmative, the ladies follow the butler through the hall into the drawing-room, Diana first giving

instructions to the chauffeur to go round to the stables with her saddle.

They find Lady Potts dressed in her best in anticipation of her callers. She rises with flurried graciousness, and has some difficulty in suppressing her desire to curtsey to Lady Mary. Though deeply imbued with the majesty of her husband's position, she has not yet shaken off her somewhat servile admiration of the aristocracy, engendered by a constant perusal of their doings in the society columns of the weekly papers.

"How do you do, Lady Mary? how do you do, Miss Gibson? I am so pleased to meet you! Sir Joseph will be so upset at not being here to receive you: we have been so looking forward to your coming!"

Lady Mary receives this information graciously, and endeavours to put her hostess at her ease, feeling herself somewhat guiltily conscious of Diana's amusement, and of the actual reason to which this much-appreciated visit is really due.

"I hope you will forgive Diana coming in her habit, but Sir Joseph had suggested she should try his horse Crusader."

"Dear me, no! Delighted to see her in any dress. Sir Joseph always calls this Liberty 'All. After all, what is more becoming than a habit, on or off a horse?"

Diana acknowledges this somewhat doubtful compliment with a smile.

"It is such a pleasure to me to see this old place again," says Lady Mary. "What charming things you have in the house, and everything is in such perfect taste to suit these lovely rooms!"

"I'm sure it's very good of you to say so, my Lady. And gracious knows the things ought to be good, seeing the price Sir Joseph had to pay for them. He always was one for having the best that money could

buy." A fact that Sir Joseph had never ceased to impress on his wife and everyone else.

"So I see! I can't think where you found such glorious pieces these days. I suppose some are old friends you brought with you from London?"

"We had some," replies Lady Potts, possibly alluding to a large hassock, a fond relic from Laburnum Villa, which she has surreptitiously imported to Kingsmede, to the dismay of Sir Egbert and the extreme annoyance of her husband, and now obtruding from underneath the sofa, "but quite a lot of these articles of virtue were bought by Sir Egbert Landrail, who renovated the house for us. A proper spender he is, and no mistake; though I can't deny his artistic tastes. I rather think he and Sir Joseph were old school chums—as Sir Joseph is such a one for art too."

After a few more minutes of this type of conversation Diana decides it is time to make a move for the stables, and asks Lady Potts if she may go out and try the horse.

Lady Potts, beginning to feel the strain of entertaining her guests, gladly assents to this proposal, and they all repair to the stables, where they find Martingale anxiously superintending the saddling up of Crusader.

Lady Mary expresses herself delighted with his appearance, and Lady Potts informs them that unfortunately Sir Joseph is not up to the horse's weight. Both guests absorb this extraordinary piece of news without comment.

Martingale puts Diana up, and is full of advice as to how the horse should be ridden, all of which she appears to appreciate, not that she really attaches much importance to his views.

She now walks out under the handsome old archway that supports the large stable clock and turns down the lime avenue, followed by Martingale. She leaves the reins loose on the horse's neck while he strides freely

out, gently patting him on the shoulder once when he attempts to break into a trot. For the first time for many months Crusader feels that he is in sympathy with his rider. Once over the bridge, they trot on till they get to a wide stretch of grass, where Diana lets him break into a canter. She realises that he is just a bit keen to go on when he hears Martingale come pounding along behind him. He does not actually pull, his head is naturally too well placed and his balance so perfect, but he gives her the impression that he expects to be suddenly asked to gallop all out. She sits very quiet on him and just lets him gradually have more rein, which he takes almost without realising it. Very soon they are cantering smoothly, yet freely, with the utmost comfort to both. Before they reach the lodge gates Diana pulls up and turns across the park, telling Martingale she will have a canter round on her own and come back to the same place.

As they get on to the wide expanse of open grassland Crusader again shows the same symptoms of nervous uncertainty. He snatches at his bridle, a device he thought he had invented as a counter to Potts' spasmodic jerks on his mouth, which as often as not were his master's sole means of retaining his balance. Diana is sure his mouth has not yet been spoilt, though he has learnt certain tricks purely in self-defence. She hesitates for a moment as to whether she shall try to correct him by shaking his bridle when he snatches at the reins. She decides, and possibly wisely, to do nothing, as she does not want to upset him the first time she is on his back. If they can make friends from the start, she feels pretty confident of ultimate success, so she lets him slip along of his own free will. As they gallop over some rabbit holes she feels her heart in her mouth, but these are soon left behind, and again they are on sound going. She takes a gentle pull at him, to

which he responds, and by degrees she gets him back to a trot, and then to a walk.

Having promised her aunt not to jump him, she refrains from putting him at some posts and rails, but as they stand opposite them, he begins dancing on all his toes and snatching at his bridle, as though he were anxious to get to the far side as quickly as possible. Though Diana does not intend to jump, she wisely walks him up to them and makes him stand still with his nose touching the top rail. He bites impatiently at it in a subconscious attempt to relieve his nerves. As she stands there patting and talking to him, he gradually gets into a quieter frame of mind. His rider has intelligently appreciated what is going on in his brain, and having done so she will soon be master of the situation.

"Poor lamb!" she says. "You are only upset and nervous because you think every time you jump a fence you will get a chuck on the mouth. No wonder you want to get it over quickly! I promise you I'll never do it. You mustn't be upset; you are going to be quite happy and like jumping again. We'll very soon understand each other. You will be a good boy, won't you? Now we'll go back."

She turned him round and cantered back to where Martingale was standing.

"I thought you'd like him, miss," observes Martingale. "Of course Sir Joseph is a bit too heavy in the hands for a high-couraged horse like that."

"He did tell me he was not up to his weight," says Diana.

"Yes, miss. What I says is, the horse just wants nice, quiet handling; he's the type of horse I used to buy for his Grace the Duke of Poplar. I used to make all his young horses for him. He was a fine horseman,

and so modest. When anyone remarked on his horses out hunting he'd say, ' I must give credit where credit is due—Martingale made the horse, I merely sit on him.' He would often say, ' I don't want no running Martingale nor standing Martingale, but I can't do without the Martingale hands.' "

The owner of the said hands is now trying to demonstrate their excellence by deftly tightening the curb rein and overbending his horse, while he niggles at him with the spur, thus provoking a capering, fidgety gait which only his exquisite horsemanship can restrain. Though this may have impressed the Duke of Poplar, it has the opposite effect on Diana, who remarks:

" Yes, it's so often the case that those who excel at any particular thing are the most modest, and never blow their own trumpet," although she was really longing to tell him to stop irritating his horse.

When they reached the bridge they met Lady Mary and her hostess walking towards them.

From the expression on Diana's face there was no doubt that she had already made up her mind.

" Oh, Lady Potts! " she exclaims, " will you tell Sir Joseph I like Crusader immensely. In fact I'd love to ride him home now."

" I think it would be best to have him sent over, Diana, after he has been examined by Whistler, and then, if he is sound, he can come straight to Rushworth," suggests Lady Mary, as they walk back to the stables.

" I am sure Sir Joseph will do whatever you wish—I'm so sorry he has been called away on some political business. What with hunting and one thing and another, I hardly see him from morning till night! Then in summer he's just the same, gadding about like a butterfly. In all my born days I never knew such a man! " declares Lady Potts.

Lady Mary had never met Sir Joseph in the flesh, but she certainly had never pictured him in this ephemeral state.

"It's so fortunate you love the country, Lady Potts. Personally, I find I am so busy, I never seem to get through all the things I want to do when I'm at Rushworth. When I'm in London I long to be back there."

"Oh, I find it so quiet here compared to town! There's always something doing there. Sir Joseph has his box at the opera, and what with theatres and charity bazaars, I never have no peace from morning till night."

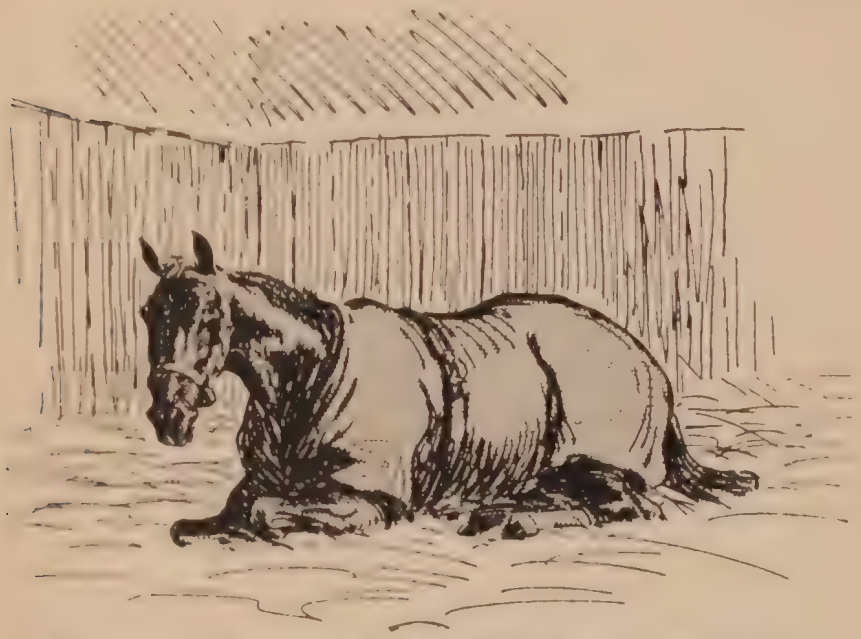
Poor motherly old soul! she would have liked to confide in Lady Mary and tell her that she sometimes yearned for the old days in Laburnum Villa, when the mere sight of Joe's trousers hanging at the foot of the bedstead was a real comfort and joy to her. But she knew that her husband never approved of what he called her "sob stuff."

When Diana dismounted she paid an affectionate farewell to the horse—in fact she was so delighted at the prospect of realising her ambition that she nearly kissed Lady Potts as well. Once in the motor she persisted in warmly hugging her aunt, and calling her her precious, darling, criminal accomplice.

Crusader was passed sound by the vet., and "Pauper's" cheque for him arrived the same morning. He had generously made it out for £375, because, as he said in his letter accompanying it, that he would have paid nearly that amount if he had bought him for three hundred and fifty guineas at Tattersall's, not to mention the expense of his keep during the summer. However, Diana stuck to her word, and returned him £25 with her best love, saying it really gave her more pleasure to

have paid a little bit towards him herself, she was so pleased and proud of having such a beautiful animal.

In due course Crusader came over to Rushworth, where all preparations had been made for his arrival. At first he was afraid that he had changed hands only to become a hireling, but once installed in a nice airy box in his new stable he felt more at his ease, and his misgivings were completely dispelled when he recognised



That night Crusader laid down to rest, a very happy and contented horse.

his new mistress as the little lady who had ridden him a few days ago in the side saddle.

When she had given him some carrots and made a fuss of him, he felt more like his old self than he had been for many months past, and that night he lay down to rest, a very happy and contented horse.

No animal appreciates kind attention more than a horse, and he equally resents roughness. Obviously their characters differ as much as children's: some are

timid, others are bold; some excitable, others lethargic; some amenable, whereas others are wayward. We would not be far wrong if we took the advice of the old stud-groom at Rushworth: "I sez what I always sez—you treat 'em as you would humans, and you'll never have no trouble."

CHAPTER IX

DICK

The same day that Crusader took up his new quarters at Rushworth brought another fortunate guest by the 7.30 p.m. train. This was Dick, or Mr. Dick Phennell, as we should introduce him to our readers. He was now twenty-six years old, and might best be described as a true son of his parents, who had been very charming people, though, sad to relate, now both dead; but, fortunately for Dick and his sister, they had lived long enough to bring them up on the right lines.

The girl had married a Foreign Office official, and now lived abroad; consequently Dick found himself more or less on his own, with quite a reasonable income for a soldier. Like many another good fellow, he tried to make this income go three times as far as was economically possible. Tradesmen are always willing to give credit to any young man if they think he has a sporting chance of ever coming into more money. Though it is to Dick's credit that he never anticipated ever being a rich man, others must have reckoned on the fact that he had rich relations, and that some day he might be better off than he was at present. Besides, he looked so honest. Nor did he belie his looks. Even though he was a bad hand at paying bills in time to claim the discount held out by obliging tradesmen, he periodically managed to produce a little on account, to show he had not forgotten them and would shortly be favouring them again with his esteemed orders.

The mere fact that Dick arrived at Rushworth with a stud of five horses would lead strangers to suppose that he was what would be usually described as comfortably off; some would put it at £2000 per annum, others at £3000, both exceeding the mark by two or three times the correct figure.

He was popular with men because he was so obviously a gentleman—quite incapable, that is, of any mean act. He was a real good sportsman, and, though he had not yet arrived at the age to take life too seriously, he was always ready to take the rough with the smooth and to accomplish his full share of work. He was popular with women, being always natural and cheerful and a real man. No one would describe him as handsome, but he was well made, as hard as nails, and clean and healthy in mind and body. He was one of those people who would always have a grin on his face when in a really tight corner, and everyone instinctively trusted him the first time they met him.

Having been brought up with horses and hounds since his earliest days, he was well versed in hunting lore, and when it came to riding a hunt he would be in the first flight over any country. It was probably due more to his capabilities as a horseman than to the depth of his purse that he was enabled to maintain a stud of high-class horses. A horse that Dick had hunted a season would be considered a safe conveyance over a country, and rightly so. It is pretty certain that his horses generally paid for his hunting. He had also on one occasion spent six weeks with an old friend of his father, a most capable trainer of " chasers." Here Dick had learnt to ride gallops and schools, and even a very fair race. When he first appeared in public on one of his own horses, the stable jockey was also up on another horse really out for a school. During the race he could be heard giving young Dick his instructions

and keeping him in his place, in addition to looking after his own horse: a very creditable performance, resulting in Dick's winning by half a length.

Having passed through various vicissitudes of youth and so far evaded the pitfalls, Dick had amassed his fair share of experience and was quite capable of looking after himself. He had formerly spent part of his schoolboy holidays at Rushworth, and Lady Mary was delighted that he should come back there for his leave when he was home from abroad.

On this particular evening when Dick came down to dinner he found his cousins already in the drawing-room ready to welcome him. They were sitting by the fire as he entered.

The warm cosiness of the big room, with its masses of flowers, its comfortable chairs and voluminous damask-covered sofas, and its softly shaded lights, was enhanced by a log fire crackling and blazing in the wide hearth, its flicker playing over shining old mahogany and walnut furniture in far-away, shadowy corners.

"My dear," says Lady Mary, coming forward with outstretched hands to greet him, "it is good to have you back. Diana and I have been sadly in need of a nice young man to cheer us up!"

Dick smiles as he takes her hand.

"I can tell you it's simply topping to be back again, cousin Mary. And it's extra good luck to find Diana here too." He turns to his cousin with a mixture of raillery and ingenuous admiration. "What a fine girl she's grown, hasn't she?"

Dick's cheery good-humour is evidently infectious, as a responsive smile lights up Diana's pretty face.

"Dick, you cheeky brat!" she retorts, laughing. "I won't stand any nonsense from you! If he doesn't behave himself we'll send him to have his dinner in the stables, won't we, Aunt Mary? Only," she adds,

" as a matter of fact, the company we keep there is much too good for him."

Dick laughs in mock submission, and sits down beside Lady Mary.

" Well, tell me all the news," he begs them, " and especially about the company you are keeping in the stables. How is everybody, and has anything exciting happened since I was here last ? "

Diana needed no further encouragement to embark at once on the all-absorbing topic of her new horse.

" The most exciting thing possible has happened ! " she exclaims, " I've bought, or rather ' Pauper ' has for me, the most wonderful animal in the world. He is too perfect to describe. He is beautiful to look at, and his manners, we hope, will soon be beyond all praise. In fact, Dick, my dear, if you did find yourself dining with him you'd be amazingly lucky."

Dick is suitably impressed by this piece of news, and they discuss Crusader, his past history and future triumphs, until the butler arrives to announce that dinner is ready.

During this excellent repast they discussed the various inhabitants of the neighbourhood and the prospects of sport—in fact all local topics which were of particular interest to the newcomer. Lady Mary and Diana were equally anxious on their side to hear all his news.

Did he like his new station ? Was he going to get the Yeomanry adjutancy ? Had he got any new horses or servants ?

In reply to the last question, he informs them that he has got one new servant—a soldier valet whose originality was a constant source of amusement.

" I picked him out of my troop because I thought he showed such marked ingenuity and initiative," Dick laughed. " One day at kit inspection my Squadron

Leader noticed amongst this fellow's outfit an old, dilapidated tooth-brush, which obviously had been used for putting chrome yellow on to the stripes of his overalls. Major Dixon asked him, 'Do you ever use that for your teeth, Palmer?' To which Trooper Palmer, standing smartly to attention and smelling a rat, replied, 'Very seldom, I assure you, sir!' I couldn't help thinking," concluded Dick, "that such ready wit and masterful grasp of a doubtful situation indicated ability above the average, and I decided to take him for my own servant—and so far I haven't been disappointed!"

Lady Mary smilingly remarked that Dick showed originality and, she hoped, discretion in making his choice.

Dick now adverted to the subject of Crusader's previous owner. "What sort of chap is this old Potts who's taken Kingsmede?" he inquires.

His elder cousin wisely expresses no opinion on this subject, but Diana replies enthusiastically for both. "Of course we both think he's a perfect dear, don't we? Possibly he's a little out of the ordinary in some ways, but to see him is to love him, isn't it, Aunt Mary?"

But her aunt refused to be drawn, her unwilling rôle of accomplice to the unabashed Diana being still fresh in her memory.

Before going to bed that night it was decided that, as hounds were a long way off next day, they would ride some of the horses in the park and take the dogs out for exercise.

Diana had already ordered Crusader for herself, and it was agreed that Dick should ride Duchess, who was a kind, sensible creature, and no doubt this would have a quietening effect on the more impetuous Crusader.

CHAPTER X

A MIXED PACK

DIANA came down to breakfast the following morning looking very attractive, but at the same time thoroughly businesslike, in a well-cut blue habit and a neat pair of field boots.

Breakfast at Rushworth was invariably a pleasant meal. Lady Mary preferred to have it in a small, sunny room leading out of the dining-room. The table, with its lovely Queen Anne silver and a large bowl of flowers, stood in the bay window overlooking the park. It was a bright, comfortable room, warmed by a cheerful fire and appetisingly fragrant of hot coffee and fresh scones. Lady Mary's Scotch cook was the last word in excellence, and much appreciated by all who made her acquaintance, if only through the medium of their palates.

"I feel very guilty for my share in the purchase of Crusader," said Lady Mary to Dick, as she handed him his coffee, concealed under a thick layer of rich cream floating on the top of the cup. "But now the responsibility of making him a well-behaved gentleman lies with you and Diana. I know you will help her, won't you, Dick?"

"Rather! From what Diana told me last night, I am sure he will come right. After our ride we are going to make out a careful programme."

"I am sure he'll be an angel when we really understand each other?" asserts Diana.

"When who understand each other?" inquires Dick, looking across the table at his pretty cousin.

"We are thinking of taking all the dogs with us to keep him company," she continues, disregarding her cousin's question, and getting up to look out of the big bay window across the wild, undulating park, with here and there gigantic patriarchal oaks, in some cases so aged that their great-grandchildren had served their country under Drake against the Spanish Armada. "We might have a hunt after one of those hares in the old deer park. Probably a morning spent with the dogs will do him all the good in the world. Minstrel and Music have got enough cry for a whole pack of hounds, and it will be no use his getting excited, because nothing on earth will hurry them!"

These were two old basset hounds, who, with three terriers and a lurcher, completed the pack; not a very level lot to carry a good head, but ready to hunt whatever turned up, each in his own peculiar way.

The lurcher would hunt by sight when possible, and then would resort to his nose, running mute, perhaps, for a field or two, ahead of the rest. Next would come the terriers, who would depend upon their noses to find their quarry, and if they were close upon him would yap with excitement. They would probably hunt the lurcher till he was out of sight and then cast around to pick up the scent, when they would very likely be reinforced by the basset hounds, who would solemnly hunt every inch of the line, depending wholly on their noses, their deep note producing an even greater volume of music than twenty-two couple of foxhounds. On one occasion they had been seen in one of the long passages at Rushworth, hunting a mouse only two yards in front of them, the two bassets melodiously throwing their tongues and solemnly working out the line on the

thick carpet without gaining any ground on the fugitive mouse.

When Diana walked into the stable yard she was greeted by the old stud-groom, who reported that Crusader was settling down in his new home and had emptied his manger this morning, that all the horses were well, and that Master Richard's chestnut mare, Goldflake, who had been coughing just after she arrived, was all right again.

Dick, who had come down earlier to make a careful inspection of his horses, now appeared on Duchess, and Crusader, with a side saddle on, was brought out for his mistress.

"He doesn't seem to mind a side saddle, does he, Stubbs?" she remarks to the old groom.

"No, miss; they seldom do, unless someone pulls the balance-strap tight, and it don't want to be that."

She gives the horse a bit of sugar, is put up by Stubbs and then walks quietly round the grass quadrangle in the middle of the yard.

Dick stands still watching the pair, apparently lost in admiration, a fact not missed by Diana, who continues to walk round, though whether it is for her horse's benefit or for Dick's, it would be difficult to say.

Her cousin as yet having made no comment, she remarks, with mock indifference, "I see you don't care for him, Dick!"

"My dear Di! Why, I think he's about the nicest quad I've seen for donkey's years. The combination's perfect, and you know I'm not much of a hand at flattery. Seriously, though, I think you've got something a bit extra."

"Well, I'm glad you don't dislike us," she answers, beaming with delight. "I love him already."

"I'm not surprised, Di. He really is a topper to look at."

Dick then gives a signal, and the pack are let out, wild with excitement. After a few minutes spent chasing the stable cat, they are got together and a start is made, Dick leading the way and Diana bringing up the rear.

They hack quietly down the drive that leads through the deer park.

"We're sure to find a hare in the rough grass over there," says Diana, pulling up alongside her cousin and pointing to the place with her whip.

"Right ho!" replies Dick as he turns his horse in the direction indicated, giving a whistle to keep the pack with him.

As they reach the patch of rough grass and dead bracken, "Yoic, push him up there, little fellows!" he cries, and they spread themselves out, the lurcher casting in wide circles, trying tufts of grass where experience has taught him that a hare would most likely be found.

He had previously been the property of a notorious poacher, from whom Diana had bought him, and had caught many a rabbit and hare single-handed.

The terriers are working busily, and occasionally one gets a glimpse of a diminutive white tail in the air as they jump over bracken and scrubby bits of gorse in the vain hope of pouncing on a sleepy hare in its form.

The bassets are solemnly drawing, with noses to the ground, dwelling pensively on any suspicious smell.

Dick is now in the middle of them, cracking his whip, and Diana is watching outside on Crusader, who is keenly interested in the proceedings.

Crack! goes Dick's whip, and up jumps a hare, running down a pad-beaten track in the long grass and out into the open across the park. Dick's holloa brings the lurcher over to him just in time to see Puss jumping a gap in an old stone wall. Off she goes, ears laid back, with the lurcher in hot pursuit, and both are soon lost

to view. The terriers are soon after them, and the bassets, now throwing their tongues, are settling down on the line. Dick pops over the wall to see if he can get a view of the hare and long dog, who are now out of sight, while Diana holds Crusader back to a half trot, half canter, a pace rather too good for the bassets. She makes him stand and wait while they scramble over the gap in the wall, their speed much impeded by the volume of music that they are producing. It is too great a trial for Crusader, who is now caprioling like a *haute école* horse. Once the bassets are over and she can hear their cry on the far side, she lets him jump the gap with only three yards' run. He bounds in the air, jumping quite three feet higher than he need do, but is so relieved to find his head free that he gives a small buck of delight on landing. Fortunately Diana is prepared for this and pretends to take no notice of it, though she had rightly intended to give him a slight chuck in the mouth with the bridoon rein if he had continued his pranks. As he does not, she pats him on the neck and canters on, giving a wide berth to the two bassets diligently holding to the line. The terriers, two hundred yards ahead, having lost sight of the lurcher, are busily casting round and trying to pick up his trail. Dick, erect in his stirrups, is standing on a hillock from where he can see the leading hound of the pack, now reduced to hunting with his nose. The hare, who has scrambled over a ditch and through a fence, jinks left-handed and runs down the hedgerow. Spider, the lurcher, has over-run the line here as he clears the whole fence in his stride. Though the bassets are half a mile behind, the hare, who has paused for a moment, hears their deep-noted cry, and with one ear back and the other cocked up she pushes on, jumps a biggish ditch full of water, gradually bearing round on a left-handed ring. Dick canters on and stands by the fence awaiting the tuneful approach

of the bassets accompanied by Diana. The two old hounds come tow-rowing along, scramble through the fence and instantly turn left-handed on the line of the hare.

"Pop over on Crusader, Di," orders Dick. "I'd like to see how he does it."

"Come on then, sonny boy," answers Diana, collecting her horse and squaring him at the fence. She touches him with her heel and he is over, and right out into the far field.

"Couldn't be better, but just a bit too much in a hurry," comments Dick judicially, following after her on Duchess.

Spider and the terriers hark back to the two bassets, and the old lurcher, running mute again, leads the pack down the hedgerow, jumping the big, water-logged ditch in his stride as he meets it. The terriers plunge in after him and scramble out on the far side, while the bassets pause babbling on the brink, then ponderously slide in, looking somewhat like skewbald sea-lions as they scramble out, wet and muddy, on to the opposite bank. The horses follow them over, Crusader propping slightly on taking off, but landing well out into the field beyond. He probably remembers that last ducking with old Potts on his back, and is nervous of a bad take-off. But as he has no idea of refusing, he is sure to regain his confidence after one or two similar schools, and no doubt will soon jump water again with his accustomed assurance.

Once more the lurcher is at fault, and can now be seen working in a patch of roots, where he puts up a hare, very possibly a fresh one, which crosses only a few yards in front of Minstrel and Music, with the terriers yelping close behind her. The bassets show no more excitement, and apparently much prefer to rely on their noses in preference to their eyes. The hare runs back

in a semi-circle across the park. Spider, now a bit cunning, running on the inside. The hare scrambles through, and the long dog over, some stout railings which Dick and Diana cannot resist jumping abreast, Crusader gaining two lengths on the rather staid Duchess, who knows exactly what and how much she should do on all occasions. Puss runs up a grass cart-track under a gate, then jinks back left-handed, making for the old sunk fence. Spider, in hot pursuit, turns with the hare, though losing some lengths, but as the latter jumps over the haw-haw, he dashes in at an angle and seizes her in mid-air.

"Whoo-whoop! Beautifully done, old man!" shouts Dick enthusiastically.

"Poor little hare! I'm so sorry when we catch one," bemoans Diana.

"Well, I call it a jolly good hunt—magnificent pack—heaven-born huntsman!" exclaims Dick, with a broad grin on his face. "Hard riding field. What I say is, Why go to Melton?"

In the meantime, old Spider, panting with his tongue out, sits down beside the hare, prepared to carry it back all the way to the house.

They gradually collect the pack and turn for home and lunch.

"Well, what do you think of Crusader?" asks Diana, reining in her horse to enable the bassets to keep up with them. "I'd like to hear your views before I give mine."

"Well, I think he's a topper. You don't seem to have any trouble to hold him, but he's a bit nervous, for some reason, when he jumps. You can see he's been upset some time and he's not quite sure of what may happen. I daresay he's not quite sure yet whether it's you or old Potts on top."

"Dick, you *are* a goose! D'you know, I believe

he really likes jumping, and he feels so wonderful and strong, though certainly he gives me the impression he's in a hurry to get it over. When we jumped that bottom he was distinctly nervous that he might fall in. I know he wanted to do the right thing. He doesn't really quite understand how it was he came to grief with old Potts at the brook. Do you, my pet?"

To Diana's extreme delight, Dick entirely agrees with her.

"Well, I haven't the slightest doubt you'll get him right, Di. I'd just take him out hacking and pop him quietly over all sorts of things, and we'll have him out several times with the home pack before he goes out hunting properly. My mare Goldflake was exactly the same. Now you can race her, and when you hunt her afterwards she's still like a lamb. It is purely a question of educating his brain; because he's none of your mad, tear-away creatures." He holds Duchess back a step to get a better view of Crusader. "A beauty to look at, too; I bet he'd make a chaser."

"I don't want him to be a chaser," laughs Diana, "even if Goldflake does do both."

"That reminds me," says Dick, "I must get those old schooling fences put right. Hope they still keep the rabbits away from the gallop below Will's house? However, there's plenty of time for that."

Diana was immensely interested.

"Oh! when are you going to run your horses?"

"Not before the beginning of April." Dick's eyes sparkled. "I'd love to win that big hunters' race at Bickhampton, Di."

"Oh, Dick, what fun! Which horse will you enter?"

Dick patted his mount's glossy neck. "Not staid old Duchess, at any rate. But I know Goldflake's pretty useful; and Rushton has never been beat in a point-to-point, but I don't think he's anything more

than that. Little Nipper, the bay horse in the end box, can't stay more than two miles' 'chasing. So I have three that may perhaps catch the judge's eye, as the sporting journalists say, but I think it's sure to be Goldflake."

"*How* exciting, Dick!"

"Well, what I'm really looking forward to is two months' jolly good hunting. Then, after that, we can see what's fit to run in the spring. One thing, though, I'm pretty certain of, and that is, that I've nothing to touch Crusader when he gets really fit."

Diana's whole face lights up with joy and pride.

"I am so pleased you like him, Dick—and you really do think he can be made a perfect gentleman in three or four weeks?"

"I'll lay any odds about it. Not the slightest doubt about it," he confidently assures his cousin, who proceeds to explain the course of training she is considering for her pupil.

"I'm going to hack him to the meets as often as possible and let him go quietly home. Then on non-hunting days, if we are both here, I'll take him schooling over lots of little fences, till he thinks no more of jumping than of trotting down a road."

"That's right," observes Dick approvingly, "the more you ride him yourself the better. Let him have all he can eat, and say an average of two and a half hours' exercise a day. I know that ass Martingale never gives any of his horses enough work. By the by," he continued, "on Thursday I am riding over to Archie Languid's to lunch. Cousin Mary won't mind your going there with me, will she? It would be a good hack for Crusader, and we might pop round Archie's fences. Besides, it'd be much more fun if we both went."

"Yes, that's a splendid idea," agrees Diana. "I'd

love it, and I'm pretty sure Aunt Mary won't mind my going there with you to look after me, Dick. Besides, I know she really likes Archie, so it would be unkind of her to deny him the pleasure of our charming society!"

The idea of doing things together began to have an irresistible appeal to them; not a day must be wasted. Both, overflowing with the zest of life, and with so many interests in common, already found an ever-increasing pleasure in each other's companionship.

"Splendid! That's a bargain, then! By Jove!" Dick cracked his whip exuberantly—"I *am* glad to be back here, Di! It's simply glorious! And I'm jolly glad you're here too."

"So am I, Dickyboy." Carried away by his enthusiasm, she unconsciously adopted her old pet name for him, which she had not used since they were small children together.

CHAPTER XI

HONEYSUCKLE HALL

PUNCTUALLY at 10 a.m. Dick and Diana started to hack over to Honeysuckle Hall, the seat of Archibald Languid, Esq.

On the way they called at Will Drake's; he was out, but Mrs. Will was at home and delighted to see them.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "Will'll be so sorry to have missed you! My, I declare Master Richard has grown!" Force of habit always drew this declaration from Mrs. Drake, who made all her comparisons between the present day and the time when her old master and mistress were alive. In those days, as the huntsman's wife, she came, by virtue of his office, first in order of precedence on the long roll of tenants, servants and retainers at Rushworth, a position which she filled with undeniable tact.

"You'll be stopping on for the season's hunting now, I suppose, Master Dick," she added. "My word! I can tell you Will's been talking of nothing but your coming for the last month."

"By Jove! I am sorry to have missed him, Mrs. Drake," says Dick, and he adds enthusiastically, "Tell him, though, I'm hoping that we'll have some rare hunts together this winter."

"Dick, we mustn't waste time," interposes Diana. "He's no idea of time, you know, Mrs. Drake, and if Will had been here, I know we'd never have got to Honeysuckle Hall to-day."

"Got a bit out of hand since I've been away, eh, Mrs. Will?" grinned Dick, with a jerk of his head in the impatient Diana's direction. "Well, give Will my love, Mrs. Drake, and tell him I'll come down and have a buck with him to-morrow or the next day. Yes, we really must go"—Dick glanced at his watch—"if we're going to have a school on the way. Oh, and tell him he oughter been out with us the other day with Spider and the bassets. By Jove, he'd have seen a bit of scientific hunting then!"

"Oh, he heard you all right, Master Dick. In fact he nearly went out to find you. It was all I could do to stop him. If he hadn't had to go to Milchester——"

"*Will* you come on, Dick?" interrupts Diana with mock severity, catching her horse's bridle and pretending to lead him away.

"Milchester market," Mrs. Drake continued her interrupted remark," he would have certainly joined you. But I'll tell him you'll be round to-morrow or next day for sure."

"Right ho," says Dick, waving his hand in farewell; and then basely to his reproachful cousin: "Now for goodness' sake come on, Di. You know you're always late and you'll ruin my reputation for punctuality."

Discreetly keeping out of the range of Diana's retributive whip, Dick starts off, and they trot across the park, through the grove of giant oaks, eventually pulling up short of the fence that stands half-way up the slope from the Lodge gates.

"Even if the fences are derelict we might canter round a few up this end," Dick suggests. "Let's have a go at this one, Di. Best go slow, for Crusader's instruction. We'll start side by side, and if he shows any excitement I'll drop back."

Off they start, the bay and the chestnut side by side at a nice free canter, each horse bending kindly to his

bit. They move so smoothly, so gracefully and withal so comfortably, the three-time rhythm of their paces producing a rocking-chair effect, restful to both horse and rider.

They jump the first fence, or what remains of it, side by side. Then, little by little, Crusader lengthens his stride till the three-time beat of the canter becomes almost the rapid four-time rhythm of the gallop.

"I'm pulling back," shouts Dick, "so that you can do the same without having to fight Crusader."

It is to Goldflake's credit that, although she is well acquainted with the atmosphere of the race course and of gallops, she unhesitatingly comes back to the feel of the curb bit in her mouth. It is more than probable she would not have done so in a snaffle. But then she has never been raced in a curb bit, whereas she connects the snaffle with a nice steady hold and the full stretch of her limbs over turf as she puts furlong after furlong behind her.

It is a simple lesson that most horses will readily learn. The mare's reflections are somewhat as follows: "I may take hold in a snaffle, in fact I'm expected to, and it won't hurt if I do, but in a double bridle it's a different matter. It is there to pull me up short, and I must just feel it so as to be able to answer instantly. To take hold in a curb bit would certainly hurt my mouth, and I know better than that."

Consequently in good hands a horse will gradually learn to carry his head in the position in which he will most readily answer the bit: roughly at an angle of sixty degrees to the ground. So placed he will ride comfortably, and yet unhesitatingly appreciate any feeling of the reins. The horse ensures comfort, the rider control. The message from the transmitter to the receiver—*i.e.* from the rider's hand to the horse's mouth—is picked up immediately and imperceptibly.

In other words, there exists a mutual understanding between both. The horse develops this sense to such a degree that he will realise on the morning after whether his master has had a late night or not.

When people lose their nerve, their horses are the first to appreciate the fact. Involuntarily the transmitter sends the message: "I don't like this fence! It's a nasty, dangerous, blind, impenetrable, trappy place—in fact I don't call it a fair fence to ask a horse." In spite of the long, rambling nature of the message, it is instantly picked up by the receiver, which answers, "Then for goodness' sake don't let us have it!" and they don't.

In the meantime, what has happened to Diana?

As Goldflake dropped back there seemed to be no inducement for Crusader to go on indefinitely and no reasonable excuse for not also wanting to stop. Diana gently but firmly feels his bit rein. It was done without fuss or flurry, and there was nothing to distract his attention, consequently he responded kindly and smoothly. It was a lesson in discipline, combining confidence and mutual understanding.

Diana then pats him on the neck, at the same time giving him a free rein and saying approvingly:

"There's a good boy."

They jump the next fence without undue effort or excitement. Dick comes up beside her once more, and again they go through the same practice, repeating the lesson yet a third time.

As they approach the remains of the old open ditch, Dick calls out:

"Now I am going to give you a lead, then pass me quietly as I ease up and pull up yourself at the turn beyond."

When Dick draws level this time, Crusader thinks little of it, and is in no way upset as Goldflake, passing

him, gives him a lead. Crusader follows, putting in a short stride to bring him right to take off about a foot clear of the old guard-rail of the open ditch and they sail right over the top twig. Dick pulls up about a hundred yards beyond, and, as they pass him, Crusader shows an inclination to stop there too, but Diana sends him on, saying, "No, Sonny Boy, you've got to stop when I want you to." Yet another lesson in discipline. When she feels the reins and says "Woa!" Crusader obeys, and both feel that they already understand each other better.

"Well done, Di!" says Dick, trotting up. "That's a jolly good performance for his first real school!"

Diana was pleased too. "I'm sure," she declared, "I could take him out hunting straight away, but perhaps I'd better stick to our three weeks' training, as you suggested—then I'm quite sure I won't have any difficulty." She leaned forward and patted the sloping shoulder with a small, gloved hand. "We both learn a little bit more about each other every time I ride you, don't we, old boy?" and turning her blue eyes towards her cavalier with a warm glow of unaffected gratitude, "I say, it's really topping of you to help me like this, Dick."

"Don't be an ass, Di!" responds her cousin gallantly.

They trot out of the Park, cross the turnpike and on through bridle-gates to Mr. Barnaby's farm.

Old Mr. Barnaby is a great sportsman, and although he has practically given up hunting himself, he always has a useful animal to run in farmers' races, usually piloted by a young nephew.

He now comes out of his house beaming with delight and welcomes his visitors.

"Good-morning, Miss Diana; good-morning, Master Richard—though I daresay you be Captain or mebbe

Major now? I'm very glad to see you back. How are you, sir; how are you?"

"First rate, Mr. Barnaby, thank you. And you're fit as ever too, I see."

"How is Peggy?" asks Diana.

"Peggy's fine, thank you, miss."

Peggy is the fair-haired, rosy-cheeked daughter of the house, who had been lady's maid to Diana until her mother died, when she dutifully came back to keep house for her father.

"Peg o' my heart, come down and welcome our visitors," old Barnaby calls out: and down comes Peggy, and soon she is deep in conversation with her late mistress.

The only drawback to a call on old Barnaby is always the great difficulty of curtailing his hospitality. The less the time at his guests' disposal, the more would he ply them with drink and victuals.

Dick is soon at work on a large slice of cake and a port glass full of sloe gin; Diana, through her hostess's tactful amenability, makes play with a reasonable-sized rock cake.

"When'll ye be coming to school round my fences?" asks Mr. Barnaby.

"Why not this morning?" answers Dick, gulping down the remains of his sloe gin.

"Better have another glass first, Master Dick."

"No, thank you; we've promised to lunch with Mr. Languid, but thought we must call in on you on our way there."

"Well, if you really be wanting a school, you can go practically anywhere you like up to the lane. My nephew ain't here this morning, or I'd send him round to show you the way. There be two fields sown, both to the left of yon big elms you see, otherwise you can go where you like and welcome. I loves to see horses

jumping—I allus have done. I mind the time when your father and 'nother genleman came schooling here. I forget the genleman's name now, but he took a toss just below that rick." Looking over the fence, he points out the landmark with his ash plant. "I reckon he and his horse must have rolled over each other half a score of times. We made certain he were dead—in fact I sends back straight to the house for a hurdle and a sheet. Then we picks him up all limp like, puts him on the hurdle and covers him up with the sheet, all so mournful in the presence of death. Then we starts off for Rushworth. It was just like a little funeral purcession; your father in front on his horse, then the other genleman's horse being led, then the pall-bearers and shroud. We were just nigh Rushworth cemetery—where lies the old Earl and Lady Rushworth, God bless 'em!—when the corpse gives a wriggle, looks out and all round him, and shouts to your father, 'Dick, you b—— idiot, you've forgotten to put my boots reversed on my saddle!' Lord! Master Dick, I shall never forget your father's face. He nearly had the hysterics himself, but he knew it weren't wise to let his friend ride after concussion, so we brought him home in state."

Evidently the situation appealed to his listeners' sense of humour. "Do you know who it was, Di? asks Dick with a grin. "Old Toby Blakeney, who now weighs fifteen stone. I remember Dad telling me about it, but I never realised it was on your farm here, Mr. Barnaby."

"That's the very spot there, Mr. Richard. I allus says concussion be seldom much to worry about if you keeps the patient dead quiet and off alcohol. Well, I mustn't be keeping you any longer, sir," concludes the old man, bottle in hand and threatening Dick with another glass.

"Dick, you b—— idiot, you've forgotten to put my boots reversed on my saddle."

"I suppose Miss Diana'll be jumping too? My, that's a fine horse! What a treat it is to see a lady aside a horse like that! Real cut of an Aintree horse, I call him, and I make no doubt he's got manners as well!"

"We are just giving him a little more polish to his manners. I bought him from Sir Joseph Potts," explains Diana.

"Aye, miss, he'll be wanting a bit o' polish from there; Sir Joseph's no pedigree stock hisself!"

"Good-bye, Peggy; good-bye, Mr. Barnaby, we really must be off," says Diana, shaking hands with both. After repeated farewells they start across the big field in front of the farm.

"We're so late, Dick, we had better just jump the four fences up to the lane and go straight on to Archie's. It's all your fault, drinking sloe gin at this hour of the morning."

"Right ho!" says Dick, disregarding the last remark. "We'll just jump the fences independently where and how we like. But you had better steady Crusader—not that he'll make a mistake, but just to give him the habit of jumping collectedly."

Crusader is presented at the first fence, a fair-sized ditch with a trimmed thorn hedge beyond. He is cantering kindly, just bearing on his bit, but when about fifteen yards from the fence Diana lets him have a little more freedom and increases the pace. The horse adjusts his stride and takes off with his hocks under him and neck slightly arched, which ensures full play to his loins. He jumps in the most perfect style, landing as light as a feather. He is so pleased with himself that he stretches his limbs well over the next field, and Diana willingly lets him sail along to his heart's content over the large pasture. She steadies him at the next fence, a strong, well-laid blackthorn, with a ditch

beyond. But she made the mistake of steadying him too close to the fence, when really he should have been able to extend his head to adjust his balance and paces. Both rider and horse realise it was not quite the finished performance that they gave the time before. That was a lesson for Diana.

In the middle of the next field she pulls up to a trot, and with a short run at a canter jumps some pretty stiff rails in the middle of the next fence. Crusader throws up his head, then, remembering that he has not got Sir Joseph on top, he tries to readjust his balance but only just in time to avoid hitting an upright post hard with one hind leg. He learnt a lesson here. By throwing up his head when there was no necessity or excuse for it, he got his balance wrong, and his hind legs dropped before they had cleared the fence.

Dick joined up at the end of the next field, and they jogged on and cantered quietly through bridle gates, which brought them out at the back of Honeysuckle Hall.

On arriving there, they found that Archie and most of the house-party were not yet up, late nights and later mornings being a frequent occurrence in this establishment.

Their host sent down innumerable messages of apology, cursing himself for being a laggard. Of course they would both lunch there. Having heard previously from Dick that they were coming for a school, he further suggested that they had better take Flinn, his Irish groom, with them and he could show them round the fences.

When they got to the stables Flinn already had received the message, and, delighted at the news, was preparing to have a lark round himself.

"The Master was just after telling me you would be lepping the fences, Captain!"

" Yes, we might jump a few, but we mustn't get the horses too hot, as we have to put 'em up here while we have lunch."

" Ah, that's aisy," says Flinn, calling to a helper to have a couple of boxes ready for the horses when they come back.

Flinn leads out an ill-conditioned, goodish-looking young bay horse with symptoms of swelling in his hind joints, which he mounts himself.

" That'll be a good sort one day," remarks Dick, observing more breeding in his movement than in his general appearance.

" The Master bought him last month from Mr. Lehey of County Cork. When he came over he had the elephantyphus terrible bad. His legs were one mass of pure corruption. I never saw the likes before. The harse had no life in him. You might belt hell out of him and he'd not move an ear. But now he's had the physic through him he'll soon be right. He has a full manger empty every time he's fed now. I think he's a harse that will have great bottom when he fills out on top."

" What does he mean by that ? " asks Diana, with a puzzled expression watching Flinn kick the bay into a canter.

" He means," Dick explained to her, " that the horse ought to be a stayer."

Piloted by Flinn they have a school round Archie's fences. The " harse from County Cork " has evidently only been accustomed to jump banks. He kicks back at every fence as if it were solid, but, as Flinn remarks, " He'll not persist long in wasting all that inergy in the air, any more than a horse will kick in his box unless he has something to rattle his hoofs aginst."

Turning to Diana, he remarks, with genuine admiration :

"That's a great harse you have there, Miss. Look at the quality of him too! Did ye know how he's brid?"

On hearing that he was by Battlement out of Turkish Delight, he threw up one hand with an exclamation:

"Ye don't say that now? Why, I knew his dam well! There was no better mare in Ireland. Sure, all her stock are winners over fences. She belonged to young Mr. Bramwell, and when he died his father took her back and has been brading from her iver since. That fellow's the dead spit of his dam, but he has the Battlement head on him. They say all that stock are natural leppers the day they're foaled. You can't kape them in a field. Maybe ye knew Mr. Bramwell yerself, miss?"

"No, I've never met him," replied Diana; "in fact I've never been to Ireland."

"Indade, is that so? Well, I'd never have thaught that now," observes Flinn, regarding Diana with compassion. "Shure, I knew the family well. I mind the time when the two young gintlemen were buoys, and they came back from shooting, with the old kaper as dhrunk as a lard. The ould fellow was an oncle of me wife's be marriage, and there was a new bothler up at the house. Before starting he wint in and tould the bothler the young gintlemen must have their usual whisky to take with them after shooting on the bog. 'But,' says the bothler, 'the young gintlemen niver touch a dhrop.' 'Ah,' says he, 'shure I always put half a bottle in each of their bouts when they get their feat wet, it's the Master's arders—shure himself always has the same. Glory be to Gard! I'd not have the young gintlemen touch the dhrink; why, their mouths are not made any more than thim colts' running out in the demesne,' says he. So the bothler gave him a bottle of whisky. Divil a dhrop did he put in their bouts."

Flinn gave his horse a kick in the ribs as he stumbled over a cart track, and after a forcible verbal reproach he continued his story:

"He was after draining the bottle himself, and at the end of the day he was so dhrunk that they couldn't put him up on the char to come home, so they brought him back laying in an ass cart, and whin I met them in the dhrive they had him hid ondhur the sthraw! They niver thould their father, but they made th'ould man take the plidge. Ivery time he had dhrink taken after that, he came and took the plidge again to the young gintlemen. He said he got more spiritual strength that way than if he wint to confession and got absolution arf the praste. They say poor Mr. Bramwell's niver been the same since he larst his eldest buoy, Mister Jack."

By the time Flinn had delivered himself of the history of the entire Bramwell family, they had reached the stables and it was time for lunch.

Great was the excitement amongst the ladies of the party at Honeysuckle Hall when they heard that Dick and his cousin had arrived and were schooling their horses; callers being so rare at Archie's house, it was universally anticipated that the new-comers had come to stay for a few days at the very least.

For some reason it never occurred to them that the cousin in question was not a man. The prospect of two more males in the household was favourably regarded; one of the ladies at the time was certainly unattached, and the little French Comtesse who had come to Honeysuckle Hall with the intention of becoming Archie's third was beginning to lose heart. Archie was delighted that she should be there, as she was both attractive and amusing, but as for marrying her—never!

In his cups poor Archie would be heard repeating to himself, "Twice bitten, damned shy!"

This little proverb, which apparently gave him inspiration and added powers of resistance, was recognised by the others as the death knell of the present romance, as it had been on previous occasions; the little Frenchwoman's fate was sealed—she would never be the "Queen Bee of Honeysuckle Hall," as the last Mrs. Archie had been nicknamed.

This state of affairs by no means depressed Mathilde de Montreuil, but she was feeling decidedly bored. She thought to herself:

"All the world but me is well installed in this house. Claire has Hugo, May has Charlie, Myrtle has Bob, Winnie has Wilfred, and as for Archie, he is a true celibate. Therefore I must choose for myself an admirer, or I will become as poor Millicent. She persuades herself she still loves a man who has recently married another. *Mon Dieu!* Only a fool will try to rekindle the embers of a fire that now burns in another hearth."

These thoughts were passing through the lady's mind when she heard of the arrival of Dick and his cousin. Oddly enough she had met him before, and they had indulged in a mild flirtation. "Deeck," as she called him, had surely been sent by *le bon Dieu* to cheer her solitude. Fate had decreed that Deeck should be her *cher ami*, and, buoyed up with this hope, she went to her room and changed her frock for one she considered even more becoming. She thought she looked a little fatigued, but a few minutes in front of her dressing-table mirror soon put that to rights. Just a little more colour, now a little more powder, and the lips, no, that's enough—another look at the glass. There, as pink and as fresh as a peony—an imitation one, but who can tell these days?

When Dick and Diana returned to the house they found that Archie had gone out to talk to his bailiff,

who had been waiting since 10 a.m. Though invariably unpunctual, Archie considered it a point of honour always to keep an appointment. This praiseworthy habit of keeping belated appointments was very trying to his dependants. They could never say, "Well, if he's not here by 1 p.m. you can be sure he won't come at all." With Archie, impelled (as he believed) by a tyrant conscience, it might be 5 p.m. or even later before he turned up.

To-day, in his absence, the two guests are greeted by Millicent, who is a half-sister of Archie's and acts as hostess for him, more for appearance' sake than for any other reason. She now takes Diana off to her room, while Dick strolls into the hall and sits down to glance at the morning papers.

While thus occupied, Mathilde perceives him as she gazes down from the gallery that overlooks the entire room. "*Quel beau garçon!*" she thinks to herself, then trips downstairs on tiptoe and, approaching Dick from behind, clasps her hands over his eyes and says:

"Guess, Mister, please!"

Dick, who is not easily perturbed, and quite capable of dealing with such situations, remains unmoved.

"Well," he says, seizing two small wrists, "it smells of Fougère Royale and the latest *parfum* Coty. Now tell me, please, am I getting any hotter?"

She leans over him and whispers something in his ear, which, as it makes poor Dick blush, was presumably not meant for other ears as well.

He retaliates by making several futile guesses, finally suggesting the name of some notorious Parisienne.

"*Quel méchant garçon!*" exclaims the lady, taking her hands away and pretending to box his ears.

Dick stands up and, intending to express much pleasure and surprise, he takes both the lady's hands

and holds them gallantly to his lips in the approved Continental manner.

Though this elegant gesture is meant to convey little more than a debonair politeness, needless to say she is delighted. But what Dick intended to be mere courtesy is accepted by the optimistic Mathilde as a proof that he has been sent by Providence to occupy the vacant place in her affections.

She has always persuaded herself that Englishmen do not make love—the women make love to the men. It is so in England, is it not?

Really to a certain degree she is right. A Frenchman is so much more frank and open in his *affaires de cœur*. Who can imagine a respectable Englishman, just previous to entering into the presence of his charmer, producing a small mirror and brush to arrange his moustache and *coiffe* his dishevelled locks, heedless of public gaze?

Therefore, now, she must make the overtures. A little subtle flattery is enough.

"But my heart beat so fast with excitement when I heard you had arrived!" she exclaims, gazing at him with her head tilted to one side.

Dick's response to this is perhaps a shade more matter-of-fact than she had anticipated. But, after all, it is early yet—doubtless at the right moment, later on, she will find occasion to murmur, with much tenderness: "Ah, so many have tried before." Artfully, and without admitting defeat, she can thus proclaim him the victor of her heart.

Perhaps, too, he may understand a little French; at any rate he will have time to think it over with the aid of a dictionary when saying a last good-night, and, blowing him a kiss before closing the door of her room, she may whisper softly:

"*Bon nuit, tu reviendras, mon petit!*"

These were the thoughts flitting through Mathilde's mind while Dick was holding her hands. In the midst of this apparently tender scene Diana entered the room,

It would be impossible to deny the fact that the spectacle which met her eyes was not just a tiny shock to her. She was not in love with Dick, of course—she had never considered such a contingency—but she was fond of him; it was a mixture of affection and childish pride of possession. She somehow could not understand his holding any woman by both hands, and in an empty room too! It was quite a new idea. He had never done it to her, and yet she was sure he was fond of her. And, to cap it all, Dick didn't seem the slightest bit upset about it.

It is quite fair to Dick to say that he was totally unaware of what was passing in Mathilde's mind. Instinct told Diana, at any rate, a good deal more than Dick had appreciated. In fact if he had realised the trend of Madame's imagination he would have refused to accept any responsibility. Certainly Dick had no wish to start an affair with her, and to-day he felt he was guardian and chaperon to his pretty cousin. Besides, he was very fond of Diana—not in love, of course, but quite devoted enough to find other women less attractive than he might otherwise have thought.

Apparently quite unconcerned by her entry, he says to Mathilde:

"I must introduce my cousin Diana to you—Miss Gibson—Madame de Montreuil."

With that instant tact of a Frenchwoman Madame exclaims:

"Oh, I am so charmed to meet you! Deeck has so often spoken of his cousin to me."

Whatever Mathilde's feelings regarding Diana may have been it would be impossible to say.

To all outward appearances she is enchanted, and it

is indeed true that, had she even imagined that this pretty cousin was in love with Dick, she would have been the last person to trespass on another's property.

At this moment Archie arrived on the scene, apologising for his enforced absence and hoping that his guests have been well looked after. They are joined by two ladies and two more men of the party, one Watty Hunter, the other Hugo Ellis, an old friend of Dick's, who had at one time been in the army.

Owing to a very scanty education, Hugo had repeatedly failed to pass his examinations for promotion, and consequently had retired into civil life. He was really a good little fellow, and every effort had been made to get Hugo through his last attempt. On this occasion a map of the ground that he was supposed to sketch had surreptitiously been prepared for him overnight, and there was little else for him to do but sign his name and fill in the north point as part of his share in the work. Hugo defeated his supporters again by filling in the north point upside down on his map, so that when he arrived at the stage when he showed the disposition of the troops on the map, his outposts were all looking in the wrong direction.

This last effort brought an end to his military career. The calamity, however, by no means extinguished his cheery optimism.

He had always derived much childish pleasure in life by wishing he was something other than what he really was. He would at times wish he was a Master of Hounds; at other times it might be the Prince of Wales or the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Once, driving with a friend through the City in the early hours of the morning, when the streets were almost entirely empty, he remarked, in all seriousness, "By Jove! I wish I was as rich as the richest man we pass between here and St. James's Street!" His friend

suggested that there were no rich people walking the streets in the City at that hour. But Hugo was not going to be caught like that. "Oh," he hastened to explain, as though determined that no millionaire skulking behind drawn blinds should be overlooked, "I count the chaps in the houses too!"

Really it seemed a pity that the Army should have been deprived of a man possessing such an ingenious imagination, when we admit that the genius of Napoleon was largely due to his powers of imagination. However, Hugo was always welcome wherever he went, and was the life and soul of any house-party.

They are still four short, and Archie begins to get impatient.

"Where are Bob and May, and Charlie and Myrtle?" he inquires, showing great delicacy in his coupling of the names.

"I think they are lunching at the golf club," suggests one of the party.

"Dash it! they ought to warn out, for the sake of the long-suffering domestics," deplores the unfortunate host, remembering that there had been some complaint about the number of successive late nights. "Let's go in, then."

They sit down to lunch, Diana on one side of Archie, and Mathilde on the other, with Dick next to her.

The cuisine and wines at Honeysuckle Hall were unrivalled, and this particular luncheon is quite excellent, so that everyone is in the best of humours.

"And what do you think of Flinn, Miss Gibson?" asks Archie.

"A charming person—and a really brilliant conversationalist!" replies Diana.

"He certainly has seen a bit of life. His father was a clown in a circus, and Flinn as a boy was brought up in the same profession, consequently there is nothing

he can't do with animals. Then, I believe, owing to a depression in the circus trade, he went to America and became what they call a bellhopper, or page-boy."

"I'm sure he must have been a charming little page-boy," observes Diana.

"Well, he was soon promoted to waiter, and when anyone touched the bell he would appear with iced water, whether you wanted it or not. He was doing this when I first met him. However, he didn't wait till America went dry, but returned to Ireland, or I suppose there would have been a slump in waiters plying everyone with iced water. There he worked with an old horse-dealer and was a great success, eventually marrying the daughter. When the old man died he carried on the business for a short time, but, having no experience of finance, he couldn't make it pay. I found him one day in Dublin, and after a talk he decided he would like to come to me as second horseman, and now he has risen to stud-groom, and a real good one, too."

"You hunt up here, Miss Gibson?" asked Mathilde.

"Oh, yes; my cousin and I hunt in couples," answered Diana, quietly determined that there shall be no misunderstanding on this point.

"I hope we will see you out, Madame de Montreuil."

"Archie has said he will ride me—no, how you call it?—mount me, is it not? But here it is so different from France! I hunt at Compiègne and I ride in the Bois when I am in Paris, but over here I find the crowd and the obstacles are so big they frighten me vaire much!"

"I think it is only a question of getting used to it; besides, Mr. Languid has such good horses."

"One has told me it is necessary to have a pilot to pull the *sangle*, to let out *l'étrivière* and to catch my 'orse when I tomble."

There is a mischievous twinkle in Diana's eye.

"Oh, Dick will do all that for you!"

"What's that?" asks Dick, pricking his ears on hearing his own name.

Diana explains Dick's duties to him by transposing Mathilde's apprehensions into plain English.

"I only said you would help Madame de Montreuil out hunting, pull up her girths, let out the stirrup and catch her horse."

"Oh, certainly!" says Dick, with a murderous glance at his cousin.

"Personally, I wish there was a law forbidding women to hunt," mutters Hugo Ellis unchivalrously.

Half a dozen voices demand, "Why?"

"Well, it would leave all the more horses for us men, and instead of being tired you would all be fresh in the evenings to entertain us."

"*Quel Mahmoud!*"

"What cheek!"

"Hugo of all people!"

"The nerve of the infant!"

"Shut up!" come from all sides of the table.

"Kamerad, kamerad!" shouts Hugo, holding up his hands, "but in a free country a man may wish what he likes! It is only convention or good manners that prevents us openly expressing all our desires. My wishes are always inspired by a sincere longing for the betterment of others, including myself." He surveys his assailants defiantly. "Only the other day I was wishing that old Sir Joseph Potts would adopt me. It always makes me sad to contemplate sterile parenthood—love's labour lost, as Shakespeare says—especially in the case of a couple so well endowed with worldly goods. There's only one thing sadder, and that is the case of parents like my own, who believed in a quiver-full. My poor mother! It always made me

think of the widow's cruse that never failed! Their bill for straw in London was always one of the biggest items in the house books. Think, too, what a little Hugo would have meant to the Pottses!"

Although Hugo is quite incapable of expressing his ideas lucidly on paper—in fact he can barely write his own name—he has what his friends call a great gift of the gab, or, as Hugo himself would express it, a singular capacity for eloquently portraying a verbal picture in true harmonious atmosphere. After a short pause he continues impressively:

"First the babe clinging to a loving mother, then the little chap in velvet suit and buckled shoes. Only too soon a schoolboy, pomaded hair and Eton jacket; then the lithesome, hatless undergraduate in pumps, with clock-embroidered, vari-coloured socks, maturing into manhood. Thus in their frail old age the loving parents would have a rock on which to lean, a pillar of strength cast in their own flesh and blood. What a picture! The two old-aged pensioners bent with the weight of years."

"You would have had to go a bit strong to enable old Potts to claim his old age pension, Hugo!" protests Dick.

"Oh, artistic licence, my dear boy, artistic licence!"

"I hope, at any rate, you won't emulate your father's practice, Hugo," pleads Claire feelingly.

"Peace be with you, no! That particular idiosyncrasy, like the gout, always misses one generation."

The ladies now rise, leaving the men to have another glass of port or liqueur brandy before rejoining them. As Dick has to leave, they do not sit long, and all the party repair to the stables to see the guests off.

Goldflake and Crusader are led out, and, to Diana's delight, everyone is lost in admiration of her horse.

They are informed by Flinn that both horses ate up

all there was and more, and he only wished he had the minding of them himself.

They bid good-bye to their host, and Dick asks him to make a day and come over to Rushworth before long. Then follows the ceremony of shaking hands with the rest of the party.

"Good-bye, Miss Gibson!"

"Good-bye, Dick!"

"Au revoir, *mon pilote!*"

Dick stoops to put Diana up: "One, two, three!" But Crusader moves as she springs, and as she cannot alight on thin air, she drops again on her right toe.

"My darling boy!" and Mathilde wonders whether she is referring to her horse or her cousin. The next attempt places Diana as light as a feather in her saddle, and Dick jumping on to Goldflake, they are soon round the bend of the drive and out of sight.

All the men vote Diana most attractive. Mathilde thinks she is a real English type, so *chic* on a horse, most charming! But what you call "all there"!

Watty Hunter, who is a somewhat ridiculous character, swears he has lost his heart for the first time. But everyone knows that Watty is always falling in love with any girl or woman, provided she is an heiress, and as soon as he has been refused by one—up till then absolutely the only girl in the world—he is again ready to propose to the next. He is one of those people who fall in love at first sight, but only when reliably informed that there is money there. In fact he seems endowed with a second sight or instinct that detects hidden wealth, in the same way that a peculiar type of dog can find truffles under beech trees. He had on several occasions got so far as to be engaged, but these engagements were never of long standing, so that one way and another it was very difficult to know what the actual situation was regarding his love affairs.

Hugo is ready now to take three to one on his proposing, and will lay any price against what he terms the "consummation of the nuptials."

The two cousins rode on for a considerable distance before any word was uttered, when Dick exclaimed abruptly as they drew up to a walk:

"I've got a bone to pick with you, Miss—letting me in for this piloting!"

Diana, although she would not admit it, thought she had a bigger bone to pick.

"My dear Dick," she said sweetly, "I thought I was doing you a good turn. I really thought you would like it. Besides, she's most attractive."

"Like it indeed! I've half a mind to square Flinn to say there isn't a horse fit to carry a side saddle in Archie's lot."

"Dick, how horrid of you! Besides, if you didn't like her, why did you kiss both her hands in that romantic way?"

"Don't be silly, Diana! That was merely my cosmopolitan manners—*entente cordiale!* It's done every day. I did it because I thought it would please her."

"I have no doubt you were most successful," retorts his cousin, with a toss of her pretty head.

"Well, I won't do it again if you don't like it."

"On the contrary, I congratulate you on your success; I think it would be very unkind to stop now."

No more was said on the subject, but that night at dinner Lady Mary noticed an atmosphere of coolness between the two young people, though she was too discreet to refer to it in any way.

When they said good-night, Dick took both Diana's hands in his and kissed first one and then the other.

All she said was, "Forgiven!" almost in a whisper,

thinking to herself she rather liked the custom provided it was applied to the right person.

But Dick was by no means sure how he was to get out of this d——d pilot business, as he called it; whereas Diana had had the best of the three-round contest.

CHAPTER XII

THE DALEBROOK HARRIERS

During the next fortnight sport was variable, the weather was unsettled and, more often than not, huntsman and hounds were disappointed.

The Rushworth party were out of luck. When they hunted with Billy Lines' hounds they would have a moderate day's sport, and the Rushworth, Colonel Brian's pack, would have a hunt. On the other hand, when they were out with the Rushworth, everything seemed to go wrong: scent would be poor, hounds could not run, and occasionally they had the misfortune to miss a good day with Billy.

In the meantime Crusader's education was continued according to programme, the results exceeding expectation. As his first master had predicted, anyone would be able to ride him, provided he was in good hands for a month at the beginning of the season. He and Diana understood each other, consequently his naturally generous disposition was developed to the full. Old Stubbs very truly observed that there was not a kinder horse in or out of the stable, and he was thriving in body and mind. A very sage remark, for what use is a horse that thrives in body if his brain lies fallow? He is little above the social status of a pig.

Crusader's naturally sensitive mouth was again responsive to his rider's hand; in fact Diana now rode him in a short-cheek double bridle with a broad leather curb chain. In this way she was able to balance,

check, collect, turn and stop him without effort. He no longer showed excitement in company with other horses, and jumped a fence as quietly and deliberately as he would trot down a road.

It was agreed that he was now ready for the real business, and what could be better than a hunt on the morrow with the Dalebrook Harriers?

Unfortunately, Dick had to go to London that day as he had been offered the adjutancy of the county Yeomanry, and his Colonel had asked him to come and dine and talk things over, so Diana decided to go out by herself.

The Dalebrook pack were a long-established institution in the country. Old Mr. Dale, who had owned them for many years, was a fine, old-fashioned type that is daily growing scarcer. He was a strange mixture of extremes, which possibly added to his charm of character. By birth and nature he was a die-hard Conservative, and yet in many ways far broader-minded than the normal run of men in his position. He was immaculate in his dress, yet retained the fashion of fifty years ago. No one could ever imagine him in a soft felt hat, brown shoes, and what the tailors please to call a "gent's lounge suit." The mere name alone would have shocked his sense of propriety. When not hunting he would invariably wear a flat-topped, hard, black felt hat; any other colour but black he considered too virginal for one of his years. A bird's-eye-blue doubled-over tie adorned his white, turned-back-at-the-corners collar, with well-starched, rather tight white cuffs to match. Then came a long-waisted dark grey coat, with large side pockets, trousers of the same material, tight in the leg, and never, on any occasion, turned up; the whole supported on a stout pair of square-toed, well-polished black lace boots.

Beneath the brim of his hat could be seen two

twinkling, roving eyes that suggested a fund of humour, set in a round face hedged on each side by close-cropped whiskers. He loved a blood horse between his legs, yet he delighted in seeing his hounds unaided industriously work out a line on an indifferent scenting day, at such a pace that a good shooting cob would have sufficed equally well.

His whole face would show animation and pleasure when in conversation with a lovely woman, and in the same way he would exhibit keen appreciation in studying the outlines of a shorthorn bull or a middlewhite sow. He loved good vintage wine, but abhorred beer. Though he had a penchant for modern art, he detested the modern habit of smoking when good wine was on the table. He was a fine judge of hounds, old prints and pictures. Though his advice was universally sought on business matters by others, he kept little or no check on his own financial affairs. Like a wise man, he appreciated, and would only have, the best of everything; though, perhaps with less wisdom, he worried little about the price, which fortunately his income was fully adequate to meet. A High Churchman and deeply religious, yet never burdened with unctuous piety, no man enjoyed or could tell a story better after the ladies had left the dining-room.

His hounds were really twenty-inch dwarf fox-hounds, and might all have come out of the same mould; the Belvoir tan predominated, in fact he would draft for colour as well as shape. Though they naturally lacked the bone of larger hounds, they excelled in quality.

His eldest son now hunted hounds, and it is not surprising that they showed remarkably good sport; on occasions when they would hunt an outlying fox, it would take a good man and horse to live with them.

During the Christmas holidays, which had now

begun, many were the children who obtained their first introduction to hunting with old Mr. Dale's hounds.

To-day the meet is at Lossington Mill, owned by Jock Laing, who, though he came south of the Tweed many years ago, has never lost the accent of his fatherland. On these occasions he and Mrs. Jock, a stout, good-natured, comfortable body, are ready to dispense hospitality to all comers. She always makes a special point of catering for her juvenile guests during the winter holidays. On this particular morning, as Diana rides up, the kind woman is surrounded by youngsters eating the most indigestible sweets and cakes. Mrs. Jock has such a way with children that shyness amongst newcomers is instantly dispelled, and though all agree that it may be best to swim on an empty stomach, they trust it may not be necessary to do so to-day.

"Good-morning, Mr. Laing!" exclaims Diana to her host, who walks up to greet her.

"Good-morning, Miss Gebson! That's a bieutiful harrse y're reiding—a peerfect picture, 'a should say! Ye can allus obsairve a kin' o' poolish in a thorobred that ye'll no find in ither cattle."

"Yes, he is nice, isn't he? How is Mrs. Laing?"

"Oh, she's feine, thank you, Miss Gebson; she's verra busy for the moment," he explains, jerking his head in the direction of the house. "She'll be attending to the young people just back frae schule for the winter vacation. Will ye tak' something yersel', Miss Gebson?"

Diana makes some plea for not eating, and the old man, requesting that she will excuse him, turns to some new arrivals.

The hounds and the green-coated staff of the hunt now make their appearance.

Old Dale is delighted to see all the youngsters out, and has a happy knack of remembering most of their

names. He says good-morning to Diana, and makes her promise to come over to Dalebrook with Lady Mary to see some new pictures he has bought. He then has a word with Mrs. Jock, and ascertains from her husband where they will surely find in the big field beyond the water meadows.

There are a score or so of farmers and a large number of local sportsmen out, also parents of the smaller fry, who are still guzzling.

Who have we here on a large, weight-carrying bay, with a short tail and long mane? It is stout old Sir William Wortlebury, a *bon viveur* and breeder of pedigree pigs, which he somewhat resembles in appearance. In fact to see him gazing long and lovingly into a pen of prize-bred animals, one would imagine that it was an ancestor of his that originally sat for Morland when he painted "The Last Litter." To-day he is out for a good pound down the roads, to work off blood pressure, in accordance with his doctor's orders. On occasions he will walk ponderously through a gap, shouting "Hold up!" to his horse. An instinctive knowledge of the line of gates, gauged possibly by the proximity of haystacks and the position and requirements of neighbouring farms, enables him to see more of a hunt than many a bolder sportsman. Even the most nervous mother has absolute confidence in him as a pilot for her youthful beginner, but the more daring spirits have no opinion of him, and a second-season follower still under old Wortlebury's wing is regarded as a very poor sportsman by the other juveniles.

Master Johnnie Weston, aged fourteen, is discussing the prospects of sport with Peter and David Baynham, who are just his juniors, and in his, the hard-riding, set.

"Morning, you chaps! See you've got a new horse, and David has got the old pony," he remarks to Peter,

the elder, scrutinising the latter's horse with an expert eye.

"Yes, rather a good sort, isn't he? I always believe in a horse two stone over my weight," replies Peter, repeating a stock remark of his father's.

"I don't mind having Peter's pony," says the small David, "but I'm a bit fed up with always having to wear his old breeches!"

"Who's that poop there?" asks Peter, pointing to a podgy-faced youth. "One of old Wort's crowd, I suppose?"

"Looks like it all over. There always are a swarm of Wortlebellies at the beginning of the season," observes Johnnie, conveniently forgetting that he used to be one himself.

"I see Miss Gibson's out—she goes like stink! Well, come on, you chaps, no more coffee-housing," says Peter, and the boys thank Mrs. Laing and walk off, leaving the "Worts" or "Wortlebellies" to finish the feast.

Here come Madame de Montreuil and Claire Rickards, with Hugo Ellis and Watty Hunter in attendance.

Mathilde looks quite neat on a horse, and except for her rather voluminous tie, she would pass muster before the most discerning critic.

Old Barnaby's nephew William is on a wear-and-tear type of blood-horse that is sure to find its way into a rich man's stable before the end of the season.

"Well," observes Mr. Dale, "if we don't move off soon the youngsters will never stop eating, and there will be doctors' bills to add to the Christmas bills."

He throws a biscuit to two of his favourite hounds, calling them by name.

"Come on, George," he calls out to his son. "Let's see if we can find Mr. Laing's hare and have a hunt."

They cross by the old stone bridge over the mill-race, frothing and foaming on its endless course, then, skirting the water meadows, they reach the twenty-acre field where Jock has guaranteed a find.

Almost as soon as hounds are through the gate and spread out, a hare jumps up in the middle of the meadow. Off she scampers, all back and hind legs, and disappears through the fence and into the next field. George canters on with the pack at his heels and lays them on the line. First Vesper and then Marquis open, and instantly the whole pack are off on the line together.

"Forrard, forrard, forrard!" cries George. "Forrard, my little beauties!"

"Forrard together!" echoes his father, more in compliment than exhortation, as a sheet would cover the eighteen and a half couples now running with heads up and straight sterns. They literally race over the first five fields, all grass, and in a dead straight line. Then the hare bears right-handed for the high ground overlooking Lossington, passes between two birch spinneys and across a fallow field on to some plough, where she squats and listens.

Let us look and see how the field are faring.

The first two fences seem to have been negotiated without mishap, but the third is an unpleasant blind ditch of considerable dimensions, with an untidy but singularly strong-growing thorn fence on the far side.

Those who know the country, let us say, too well, have turned right-handed so as to avoid this fence, but nine or ten come sailing down to it, disregarding, in some cases unwisely, the lead given by the more knowing ones, who are now executing a wide outflanking movement to the right in the hopes of regaining the rapidly disappearing pack.

William Barnaby, Diana, Hugo, Mathilde, Watty Hunter, young Peter, David and Johnnie, and one or

two others whom we have not met are heading for the awkward fence. First of all William plunges into the big, unpleasant ditch and then scrambles out on to the same side again. He has not even had the decency to force a passage over the obstacle.

Diana by this time is pretty confident, as Crusader has settled down without showing any real excitement. The cry of the hounds naturally made him prick his ears and show an animated interest in the proceedings. He once more appreciates the pleasure of being with hounds, and as for jumping the fences, it was all so simple he could hardly believe he had ever contemplated refusing! There must have been something the matter with him then; it seems impossible to realise he is the same horse. Diana squares him at the fence, and as the ditch on the near side is so very hairy and blind she keeps him at a collected canter, just pushing him on the last three strides. He makes a great effort and lands safely, though his hind legs catch the top of the thorn fence. The strong branches scratch his legs, and one or two thorns stick in his hind fetlock joints. The place was so wide, measuring from the point where he took off, that he had not quite the necessary impetus to clear the entire obstacle.

Watty Hunter, hoping to make a good impression, had charged the fence just on Diana's right, but his horse, not liking the look of things, had stopped dead, his forelegs stuck out straight in front of him and his head extended, staring into the depths of the unknown. The unfortunate Watty shot on to his horse's head, which was gradually lowered. Slowly but surely Watty slides over his horse's ears, completing a slow-motion somersault dive into the thorny chasm, at the same time taking his horse's bridle with him. Some unkind person was heard to remark, "Going! going! gone!" as poor Watty disappeared head-first into a sea of

brambles and hedge trimmings. When he got up, still holding the bridle in his hands, he saw his horse careering round the field with young Barnaby in pursuit.

Hugo and Mathilde, with a stranger who had reconnoitred the fence further up, came to the conclusion they did not like the look of the place, and deciding that discretion would be the better part of valour, galloped round in pursuit of the outflanking party.

Now comes the opportunity for the three hard-riding youngsters. Johnnie, throwing his heart over, came at it full tilt, but his horse swerved at the last moment in the direction of Mathilde's and Hugo's horses, and it was with difficulty that he succeeded in pulling him up. To funk the fence with the other chaps looking on was, of course, quite out of the question, and he is determined to have another go.

Peter now has a try with his new horse, holding his reins in one hand and giving him a good rib roasting with his whip as he rides at the forbidding-looking place. Needless to say, with a lady already over and Johnnie Weston defeated, the blood of the Baynhams is up! The horse plunges into the ditch, where he continues to plunge, and eventually comes out at the point where he got in. But his effort has certainly cleared a gap in the thick brambles and branches with which the chasm is filled.

Just as Johnnie has managed to pull round for another attempt, David trots up to the side of the ditch on his pony, which crawls leisurely in and scrambles up the other side like a rabbit. The pony now puts his little head down and forces a way through the thorn fence on the far side, which almost results in pulling David, who is holding up one arm in front of his face, off the saddle. The lion-hearted pair have succeeded, and incidentally make a reasonable passage for the other two boys, who follow close on their heels.

"Good boy to go!" calls out the superior Johnnie to Peter enthusiastically, though perhaps inwardly sore at having had the work cut out for him by a kid.

Off they go as fast as they can lay legs to the ground, and eventually join Diana, who is alone with the hounds, who have checked in the plough.

"Well done, boys!" she exclaims, smiling at them. "With any luck we will have a hunt all to ourselves."

The rest of the field are still out of sight; if only hounds could recover the scent! There are a couple and a half feathering down a furrow and the remainder are scattered over the plough.

Suddenly little Ransom strikes a note of triumph, then two other couple join in the cry and tumble over each other in their eagerness to force the pace between the holding ridges. The rest come scampering across the wet furrows as best they can, and once more the whole pack drives on. They carry the line over the fence, across the next two fields of rough grass, with here and there scattered clumps of blackthorn and brambles, into which scuttling rabbits hastily retreat on hearing the hounds, who race past Flint Abbey Farm, with its old stone-wall enclosures, and then down into the valley again over a nice line of grass country to the river.

As the hare had turned left-handed in the plough, the greater part of the field, who had swung right-handed, are still further out of the hunt. Only two green coats and two others can now be seen by the first flighters in the ploughed field.

"Yeuic! Forrard together, little bitches!" cries Peter in the most orthodox manner, taking this liberty in the absence of the huntsman.

The boys—and, for that matter, Diana too—are delighted as they ride down the furrows in pursuit of the pack.

There is only a weak fence out of the plough, which presents no difficulties, but the little hounds are heading for a formidable stone wall, and as scent is obviously improving on the grass, our four " top-sawyers " have got to ride straight to keep with them.

The eighteen and a half couple appear to skim the wall almost simultaneously, like a covey of partridges, and are lost to view, but their rousing chorus echoes back from the old tithe barn adjacent to the farmhouse.

Diana is the first to take on the wall, which is thick through and about four feet high. The sheer weight and size of the flat slabs of stone laid on each other make it almost as solid as if they were held together by mortar. She wisely checks Crusader in good time, and can consequently present him at it out of a canter, holding him well together yet giving him the rein he requires as they approach the fence. He slightly lowers his head and jumps off his hocks, arching his back so that he clears by a foot. He cautiously tucks up his legs, yet lands like a feather, and Diana is thrilled with delight at the excellence of his performance.

Peter is over on her left with a crash that disturbs the top stones, and his horse pecks on landing. Although he is thrown forward, his knees do not leave the saddle, and he gets back again without further mishap.

Johnnie takes advantage of the gap made by his friend and negotiates the masonry quite safely.

David's pony, despising the assistance of the gap, comes on with undiminished speed in hot pursuit of the leaders. He steadies himself of his own accord and, with the confidence of experience, jumps on and off the wall without disturbing a stone.

" Clever as a bag full of monkeys ! " comments the critical Johnnie, hearing the clatter of stones and looking round.

Diana is much relieved to find her entire escort once

again in the same field with her. The next two walls are child's play to the veterans, and the pony shows its sagacity by making no attempt to bank a weak, almost transparent-looking wall.

Peter is nearly jumped off at the second, as his horse, having tested the first, decides it is not worth while trying the experiment again, and bucks over it, to the discomfort and partial displacement of his rider.

Hounds show no sign of slackening their pace, and again disappear over another formidable-looking wall. Fortunately old Squires, who farms the land, is there and holding a convenient gate open.

"This is our best way," calls Diana, with a feeling of relief from further responsibility for her young cavaliers. As they bustle through the gate, old Squires informs them that he thinks he saw the hunted hare not many minutes in front of hounds and running towards the river.

They take on a sheep hurdle, all four abreast, and then draw rein, as hounds get down to their noses in a stubble field where scent has partially failed. However, they continue to hold to it, first one hound, then another, picking out the line and triumphantly throwing her tongue. As they get on to the grass, scent again improves, and likewise the pace. Then for a few seconds they seem to have over-run the line, but casting right-handed without hesitation, they hit it off again.

"Yeuic! Forrard together, little bitches!" again yells Johnnie, to the obvious amusement of the Baynham boys, who are both grinning with delight.

Some men cutting a drain in the far end of the field must have headed the hare.

Hounds scramble over a gate, some squeezing sideways through the rails, and some underneath, which brings them into a muddy lane and down this they

hunt, coming out at the far end into the big grass enclosures extending to the river.

What a picture for the rest of the field! A bird's-eye view from the hills—specks of white and tan on the emerald-green.

But it is something to have got a view of them, and George Dale, believing there is no one with hounds, starts galloping across country in the direction they are running. He soon loses sight of them, but now sees one lady and three small Nimrods who are evidently in close touch with the fast-running pack.

These four ride down the lane, churning up the mud as they go, then through the gate on to the grass, where they shake out, and with hounds on their left front, they gallop over the sound pasture.

The next fence is not a strong one, but has a ditch and drop on the far side.

Crusader now might be a horse that has reached years of discretion; he is not fretting or fussing, and seems to realise that he is in the responsible position of schoolmaster and pilot for the smaller fry accompanying him.

He clears the fence, landing so lightly over the drop that it is almost impossible to believe that the fresh field is three feet lower than the one they have just left.

Diana is delighted with him, but anxious about David and his pony, and looks over her shoulder to see how he is faring.

There was no need for anxiety on his behalf; the pony and its rider chose a weak place in the fence, and appear to half bore a hole through and half jump off the fence, over the ditch clean into the next field.

"What a splendid little pair!" says Diana to herself.

Peter is over safely, but Johnnie's animal pecks, and this superficially precocious but good-hearted youngster rolls off on to the ground. However, like a well-trained

child's hunter, the horse stands still to be remounted. The whole incident is over in a few seconds, and before the others are beyond the next fence, Johnnie, grinning from ear to ear, has joined them.

This presents no difficulties and produces no fresh casualties. David selects a gap with a low rail across it and a ditch beyond, and sailing along at it, lands well out in the same field with hounds, which has the ridge and furrow against them, but it cannot be avoided. One would imagine it is rather a trial for the small pony, but nothing comes amiss to this little bit of good stuff, who meets the furrows right each time and clears them comfortably in his stride.

Diana, watching hounds topping the next fence—a strong, newly-cut and laid, with probably a ditch beyond—wonders rather nervously how the pony will deal with it. Feeling no further anxiety about Crusader, she pulls back slightly to keep an eye on the small boy. The two big ones sail over in fine style, then she sees the pony, still with its ears cocked, come at it. No apparent concern can be observed on the part of the rider or his mount. The latter rises clear of the top binder, and then gives a lightning kick back with its hind legs to ensure clearing the ditch. It has judged, rightly, that the fence was strong enough to resist the kick off that made a certainty of its leaving the ditch well behind it.

Johnnie is now on the right rear of hounds, Diana and the Baynham boys are on the left; the youngsters, with flushed faces, all eager to take on the brook, are standing up in their stirrups as they gallop over the old vale pastures that have been down to grass since the memory of man.

Crusader is going comfortably within himself, the two elder boys a nice half-speed gallop, while the sterling pony is fully extended. These positions remain

unchanged, and they each take their fences where they meet them, till eventually they come to the field adjoining the river, where hounds throw up.

Just on the left of the pack there are a dozen horses and riders, led by a stout man.

"Those blasted Worts have headed her!" exclaims the irrepressible Johnnie.

"What beastly rot!" cries Peter, in confirmation of his friend's views. "Of course they've come by the line of bridle gates alongside the river."

"Wasn't it fun?" says Diana to David.

"Topping!" David grinned ecstatically.

"That's a splendid pony of yours! What do you call him?"

"Yes, isn't she an absolute ripper?" The little sportsman visibly swelled with pride as he went on to explain, "Mother christened her 'Jenny Wren,' because her mother, who was a Welsh pony, was called 'Jenny Jones,' and because she says she can jump from one branch to another, just like a wren!"

In the meantime hounds are sniffing and nosing about along the river bank and amongst the Wortlebury brigade, but have failed so far to re-establish contact with their quarry.

George Dale gallops up and asks if anyone can tell him how far they carried the line.

Johnnie volunteers the information that they had a line up to a point about twenty yards away, and the hare was then probably headed by Sir William.

There is a bridge about a hundred yards up-stream, and George casts back, encouraging a few hounds to try the far side of the river. Only a short distance beyond the bridge Mermaid and Modesty throw their tongues, as a signal to the others to join them; a tired hare gets up in front of them, and is rolled over in the open before she can get on her legs again.

Riders and horses begin to congregate from all directions, most of them, with the exception of the crafty Wortlebury brigade, sweating and blowing hard after their gallop.

"I take off my hat to old Wortlebury and Co. in some respects," says Peter, standing by his obviously distressed horse. "Neither he nor any of the Worts has turned a hair, and yet they've got here!"

"Yes, but what a way to ride a hunt!" remarks Johnnie contemptuously.

Old Mr. Dale comes up to Diana and proceeds to compliment her on seeing the hunt all alone, but she hurriedly explains that she was accompanied by the three schoolboys, and that the palm should be given to little David Baynham and Jenny Wren.

"Well done, David, my lad!" he exclaims. "Tell your brother and Johnnie Weston to come here, and I will give you each a pad."

He then presents each boy with a trophy, which they accept with pride, taking off their hats as they thank him.

"A very good young entry," he says, referring to the boys, "and I hope you will all go on as well as you started the season. You will be out regularly these holidays, I suppose? After all," he adds to himself, "what is life but surmounting one obstacle after another? And riding to hounds and the physical effort for youth is the best training for the inevitable mental effort of old age."

The last pad is given to Diana.

"If it hadn't been for you, Diana, and your young cavaliers, I don't believe any of us would have been here by now. We could see you in the distance disappearing over the fences; I'm sure you enjoyed the hunt you had all to yourselves. By Jove, that's a nice horse you're riding!" he exclaims, moving back a step

or two, and evidently lost in admiration of Crusader. "I always think a high-class animal never looks better than when he is well shown in a side saddle."

"He's a perfect angel, Mr. Dale, and though I've ridden him for several weeks now, this is the first hunt I've had on him."

"Well, may you have many more! Only I hope some of us may be there too, to enjoy them! George is in a rare temper because he wouldn't have that nasty fence where you left us! He was sure the hare would turn right-handed. But if everything invariably happened according to programme we'd lose much of the joy of hunting—even us old'uns!"

Up come Watty Hunter and Mathilde, the former having joined up with the rest of the Honeysuckle Hall party after he had regained his horse.

"By Jove, Miss Gibson," he exclaims, "that's a wonderful old horse of yours!"

Diana, like most people, especially ladies, resents her young horse being dubbed an old veteran, even though it is intended as a compliment. She retorts rather curtly:

"Yes, he has got more brains than many people four times his age!" And the unfortunate Watty is aware that he has put his foot in it.

Instantly repenting her brusqueness, Diana remarks:

"I thoroughly enjoyed that hunt, didn't you, Mr. Hunter?"

Then, too late, she realises that her inquiry was even less tactful than her first remark.

"Well, I can't honestly say I did enjoy it myself," replies the youth sheepishly.

"Where is your other couple to-day?" asks Mathilde, referring to Dick, and letting her horse nibble at another horse's tail, which is fortunately too blown to remonstrate.

"Poor Dick had to go to London—he'll be awfully sorry to have missed to-day's hunt." Diana nearly said "missed you," but changed her mind. In the first place she did not wish gratuitously to encourage Madame de Montreuil in that direction, and secondly she had no desire to see Dick engaged as the recognised pilot for the lady; partly for Dick's sake, and partly—well, for a lot of vague reasons.

"After what I see to-day, and you hunt in couples, I prefer not to ask him for my pilot!"

"Oh, he is much worse than I am!" says Diana, ignoring the compliment, but seizing the opportunity of extricating Dick from the difficult position she herself had originally got him into. After all, it was up to her to defend him—besides, in a way, he did belong to her!

"I say, Miss Gibson, you and the Big Three fairly put us all to shame," says Hugo Ellis, coming up leading his horse. "Of course I'm a conscientious objector, so I've no feelings about it, but Mr. Watty Hunter was so determined that his horse shouldn't follow you that he pulled the bridle out of his mouth. I asked him to show me again how it's done, but, like all good conjurers, he won't give away his tricks. If he wasn't so modest about it, I'd introduce him to a cinema producer. He'd be a star turn in no time and making that large fortune which his efforts up to date have failed to produce."

"Your horse's near hind leg is bleeding a bit, miss," says young Barnaby. "If you'll let me, I'll have a look to see what it is."

He gets off and picks up Crusader's leg.

"He's staked himself under the joint, but I don't think it's much."

Diana thanked him with a smile. "Poor old darling!" she said. "I wonder when it happened. I'll

take him home now. He's much too precious to run any risks with."

She walks on, and feels her horse move rather stiffly behind when she trots, but it appears to wear off again.

When she gets home she tells the old groom about it, and together they examine the leg after the mud has been washed off.

"He's stubbed 'isself just under the fetlock and got a few thorns in the joint," remarks the old man; "but if there's no dirt in it there won't be much trouble; at any rate I'll treat it so as to get any furrin matter out if there be any there."

Diana rubs her cheek affectionately against the horse's soft muzzle.

"I hope it won't be bad, Stubbs! He went so absolutely perfectly all day, and it wasn't his fault this happening."

"I'll fix him up all right, miss! But when a horse has been on hard oats like him, there's always a chance of gettin' a bit of trouble from them blackthorns. I'll put him on mash to-night and give him a pinch of salts to keep him cool."

"Well, I'll come back and see him as soon as I've changed," says the anxious owner, leaving the box.

In the meantime Crusader drinks the gruel which was always ready for horses coming in from hunting. While a helper is "doing" the horse, Stubbs prepares his treatment. He is an old-fashioned servant, but is perhaps more up to date than many veterinary practitioners in his application of antiseptics. Most grooms fail lamentably in this respect. It is well worth our while studying the method and care employed by the old man in this case.

He first of all washes his hands before touching the wound with his fingers. As soon as he has done this he fetches a tin of antiphlogestine from a cupboard

and puts it in a saucepan of water simmering on the fire. Then he takes down a pint bottle, which he fills with warm water from a kettle, and into this he puts one tablet of corrosive sublimate, immediately returning the box marked poison to the cupboard from which it came and carefully locking it up; remarking to himself, "It 'ud never do to let the lads play about with this pison."

He returns to Crusader's box with these, also some cotton wool, oilsilk, two bandages, a piece of boracic lint and a syringe.

The lad in the box is hissing and sissing in that way peculiar to grooms when they are strapping a horse. "Turn him round," directs Stubbs, placing his hand on Crusader's hind-quarters, "and just keep rubbing his head while I treat his leg."

First of all he feels carefully over the leg for any thorns that may still be there; then, after shaking his bottle of corrosive sublimate, which has dissolved in the hot water, he thoroughly syringes out the wound at the base of the fetlock joint and washes the scratches on the leg with the same solution.

"Woa, my son, there's a good boy," he murmurs soothingly, as the horse stamps his foot on the floor of his box.

He now spreads the hot antiphlogestine over the upper part of the joint punctured by thorns, covers it with cotton wool, then oilsilk, and finally puts on a bandage. As this is to be left on for twenty-four hours, the treatment for the wound is kept as a separate operation.

In this case he puts on a wad of boracic lint soaked in hot water, wrung out and applied as a hot compress, covers it over with oilsilk and a fresh bandage, which can be taken off separately to apply further hot fomentations. Having examined every leg for thorns, he

then sees the horse rugged up and bandaged all round. His chief reason for bandaging all round is that he anticipates the horse standing in for two days and possibly resting the injured leg all the time.

He is just leaving the box when Diana reappears to see how her favourite is.

"Don't you worry, miss," says Stubbs cheerfully. "We've done all we can to make the patient comfortable, and I think he'll be all right for his next turn hunting."

"I'm so glad I've got you to look after him!" she says, and the old man, naturally pleased to feel that his care and attention are appreciated, proceeds to explain how the leg has been treated.

The next day the limb is practically normal, and a small amount of dirt that had got into the wound has filtered out, and it now looks healthy. Dry dressings of fresh boracic powder are applied, and the following day he is again at exercise.

CHAPTER XIII

A MIXED BAG

It was on the second day after the hunt with the Dalebrook Harriers that Dick returned.

It was a nasty, cold, raw night, and snow had started to fall.

He was delighted to get back to Rushworth, where he had been missed by the whole household.

Diana was quite concerned to find how much she felt his absence, and reproached herself for her folly. It was, of course, delightful having him with them, but, equally of course, she could not always have him at her beck and call. In fact he had already discussed the possibility of taking a small house on his own in the district if the Yeomanry adjutancy materialised.

At dinner that night Dick reported that he hoped to get the job, but would probably have to return to duty at the end of his leave before actually taking it up.

He elicited from Diana a becomingly modest account of the hunt from Lossington Mill, Crusader, of course, coming in for his full share of credit.

Already arrangements had been made for hunting on the morrow with the Rushworth hounds, and Dick's soldier servant had asked him when he had dressed for dinner, "You'll wear scarlet to-morrow, sir?" which always gave his master the impression that he was expected to appear in the Lord Mayor's robes.

"I do hope the weather isn't going to change. It

looks a bit like it," observes Dick. At that moment a footman comes in with a large envelope, which is handed to Lady Mary.

It is a note from the Potts, announcing that there is to be a small shoot at Kingsmede on the day after to-morrow, and hoping that Mr. Phennell will shoot, and that Lady Mary and Miss Gibson will accompany him and lunch with Lady Potts.

"We're hunting, aren't we, Dick?" queries Diana.

"Well, I'm afraid I can't go in any case," declares Lady Mary, "as young Mrs. Dale is coming to lunch."

"I think it's quite possible we won't be able to hunt, Di. Supposing we see what the weather is like to-morrow morning and send an answer over then?"

This plan is decided on.

Next morning the whole country is white and ten degrees of frost during the night are reported by the gardener. It is a bright day, but the wind is cold and out of the sun it is still freezing.

Consequently, an answer is sent to Kingsmede accepting the kind invitation on behalf of Diana and her cousin, with regrets that Lady Mary is unable to come.

Exercise for the horses and an afternoon's ferreting with Spider the lurcher is the programme for the day.

The latter is an amusing type of sport provided one is sufficiently warmly clad.

After lunch the two younger members of the party start off, with Spider and a couple of ferrets.

When Diana bought the lurcher from his late owner, he had written a letter explaining the dog's capabilities and how he should be worked. The letter finished by saying, "I call him 'Spider' for luck, and I wish you could see him fly"; "fly" being well underlined, so that the pun should not be overlooked by the recipient of the letter.

In accordance with these instructions Dick and Diana select an isolated burrow, so that if any rabbit bolts it will have to run from ten to fifteen yards to get to ground again in another hole. A ferret is put in, and judging from the rapidity with which he disappears, the burrow is occupied. "We'll squat here, Di," he whispers, beckoning to her and whistling to the lurcher to come there to. They wait with the dog where they cannot be seen, so as not to turn back a rabbit intending to bolt for safety. After a few minutes there is a noise of scuffling feet underground. Spider stands up, shaking with excitement, ready to dart off. Out hops a rabbit, scuttling downhill to a large burrow about twenty yards off. Spider is off like a shot from a gun, and, dashing in almost at right angles to the course of the rabbit, seizes him in his strong jaws and brings him back to Dick to kill.

"I'm so glad he takes them to you to kill," whispers Diana.

Dick pats the dog, who again takes up his position of attention.

A second rabbit pops out, only to dive down the mouth of another hole close by. Spider makes a bound, but seeing there is no possible chance of catching his quarry, he instantly stops and retreats quietly to his point of vantage, keeping his eyes glued on the exits of the burrow.

A third rabbit bolts, and meets the same fate as the first one. Hardly had he brought back the rabbit to Dick when another bolts, this time in the opposite direction, heading for a single hole under a tree about twenty-five yards off. He has got a good start of Spider, who is off like lightning, jumping clean over Dick, who is squatting down between him and his quarry. It is a very close thing; only two yards from its refuge the rabbit is seized. But Spider, who was

going like a stone from a catapult, dashes almost headlong into the tree. He sees it just in time, but in trying to avoid it he catches one of his legs in a root and turns head over heels, still holding the rabbit in his mouth. When he gets up and trots back with his catch, he is limping badly.

"End of the day's sport!" says Dick.

"Poor old pet!" murmurs Diana. "I was quite sorry for the rabbit—now I'm sorry for you!"

She and Dick examine the injured limb, which the old dog holds up for inspection with a pathetic look in his eyes.

"I think he has either ricked or knocked his joint badly," is Dick's diagnosis, as he holds the injured limb in his hand.

"When we get back I will put some Pond's on it," and pressing the old dog's ear against her cheek, she murmurs, "Mother'll look after you, won't she?"

"He's such a sensible old fellow, he won't bite a bandage off," says Dick, getting up and chasing the ferret now on a voyage of discovery above ground.

On their way back they meet the keeper, and Dick suggests to him that they might get some pigeons coming in to roost, explaining that he wants, at the same time, to give Palmer a lesson in loading, so as to take him to Kingsmede on the morrow.

It is arranged that the keeper shall go to Long Wood and Dick to Rushwood, in the hope of keeping the pigeons moving from one to the other; and as it is a clear, frosty sky, they will be able to shoot till fairly late.

Palmer is delighted when he is warned for this duty, and shortly appears with a pair of guns and a bag of cartridges.

Dick first explains and then shows him how to carry first one, then two guns, emphasising the absolute

necessity for safety. As the man has been used to handling a rifle, he proves himself an apt pupil.

He is then practised in loading with dummy cartridge and changing guns. At first Palmer gets rather mixed up with the guns, and tries to hand Dick his second gun with his right hand; but after the first two attempts he gets into the knack of it and the change is made without a hitch.

Dick continues the practice, taking imaginary shots in all directions, till he considers he has made Palmer what he calls "Fool-proof, if not quite perfect." They then walk off to their wood, arriving there about an hour before dark.

A high pigeon comes flying over, bang goes Dick's gun, and the bird instantly changes its course in that complimentary way pigeons do, giving the impression that the shot was at any rate near enough to frighten it.

Dick stands waiting for his second gun, which is not forthcoming. Then he looks at Palmer, and sees him staring up into the sky with his mouth wide open.

"Come on, what are you waiting for?" he exclaims.

"You've only fired one round, sir," the man replies.

"That's nothing to do with you! D'you suppose I am going to stand waiting with only one cartridge in my gun while you might be re-loading it?"

"Very good, sir; I understand—I'll be ready next time."

Two more pigeons come flying in to roost. Dick fires both barrels, hitting the second bird, which comes down with a flourish and a bump through the trees on to the ground.

"The first one was a magpie, sir," observes Palmer, with the air of an expert.

"What the deuce do you mean? They were both pigeons!"

"I know that, sir. I meant your shot was better than an outer."

Dick laughs and exclaims, "Thank goodness you won't have time to signal the misses to-morrow! All you have to do is to be ready with a gun loaded for me to shoot. If I tell you to mark a bird, try and do so, but always be ready with the spare gun."

"Very good, sir!"

They now hear Brambles, the keeper, shooting in his wood, and soon some pigeons come circling round them, but too high to shoot.

"Keep under cover as much as you can," whispers Dick, his eye on the pigeon, and gun ready to come to his shoulder.

"Rabbit advancing on us; he's halted. Now he's retired," in excited undertones from Palmer. Up goes Dick's gun as some birds coming in turn up against the wind with outspread wings to settle in the trees near by.

Bang! Bang! And down come two more.

Guns are changed rapidly without a hitch.

Pigeons are now coming in from the opposite direction, and Dick turns round and fires two shots at a bird, killing it a long way off with his second barrel. As a result of Dick's change of position Palmer suddenly realises he is now standing on the wrong side of his master, but fortunately nips round into his proper place quick enough for the latter not to have noticed it.

It is now getting dark, and Dick tells his man to pick up the birds.

As they walk back through the woods a pigeon which is settling in a tree just in front of them is accounted for, and makes the bag up to two and a half brace.

They come out at the bottom of the wood, where

there is a big pool through which runs the River Rush before it joins the Nene just above Kingsmede.

Suddenly they hear the flurried swish of wings in the air, and almost simultaneously against the crimson of the western sky Dick catches a glimpse of duck flighting. Two rapid shots, and a mallard falls with a splash in the water, fortunately close enough to the bank for it to be picked up.

"Coming in because of the frost," thinks Dick. "Hope that doesn't mean we are going to get it bad. Must have been a lucky shot that got him in the head, or he'd have dived."

Just before they reach the house they meet Brambles, the keeper, who produces three pigeons and a jay out of his pocket.

"What's the weather going to do?" inquires Dick of him.

For some reason one always consults such people with the implicit faith that the ancients inquired of the oracle. Oddly enough, they are often more reliable than the forecasts of weather we read in our morning papers.

"Freeze again to-morrow and then change, I think, sir," he replies.

"Hope you're right. Good-night, Brambles!"

"Good-night, sir! Shall I take your gun?"

"No, but you might show Palmer how to clean them. He is going to make a first-class loader!"

Palmer grins with pride and Dick walks into the house.

"I bet Palmer will be all right," he says to himself; "at any rate he won't lose his head. I shall have to fit him out for *la chasse* in an old suit of mine."

Later, meeting Diana in the hall, he inquired how Spider was.

"Oh! terribly sorry for himself, on a chair in my room, with a most agonised expression on his face.

I went out to try and find you, Dick, but was rather mystified by hearing two guns."

"I am sorry, Di. I didn't like to ask you to come, as I thought it'd be too cold for you hanging about."

"I wouldn't have minded," she said, walking beside him and looking up with a whimsical expression in her smiling eyes. Dick could not quite fathom that expression. He only knew that he felt what he called a swine for not having asked her, and really he would have liked so much to have had her with him all the time.

CHAPTER XIV

THE KINGSMEDE SHOOT

Next morning it was again a crisp, sunny day, though the glass showed a tendency to fall.

Dick and Palmer started off for Kingsmede, leaving Diana to come on later for lunch.

When they arrived, many of the guns had already turned up, and were assembled in the hall. Palmer looked so smart in his tweed suit, with a gun under each arm, that he might easily have been taken for a fellow guest. Dick is greeted by his host, who is dressed in a loud check plus-four suit with a belt of cartridges encircling his amply-proportioned figure. Sir Joseph has an idea that a very striking check is a sort of camouflage, in the same way that guns in war-time are covered with daubs of colour to assist in concealing them from the enemy's aeroplanes.

Who else have we here?

Some of them are old acquaintances, but a few introductions are necessary.

First of all there is Mr. Henry Hiels, who has had an exceedingly prosperous year. During the last six months the Goddess of Fortune had never ceased to smile on him. In fact he was recently a prominent buyer at Doncaster Sales, and will shortly blossom out as an owner on the turf. Prosperity is stamped on him from head to foot. Like Sir Joseph, he also favours a post-impressionist type of check; a bright yellow waistcoat and diamond ring immediately catch the

eye. His nether limbs are encased in an *en-tout-cas* type of breeches of the same material, suitable for riding, shooting or adornment of a bookmaker's pitch, giving, as they are no doubt intended to, an appearance of all-round sportsmanship. His shiny yellow leggings, outlining a well-turned calf, are the latest novelty in patent adjustment of hooks and straps.

"Mr. 'Enry 'Eils, a patron of the turf—Mr. Phennell. one of the best sportsmen in our country," says Sir Joseph, introducing them.

"Proud to meet any friend of Joe's," beams Mr. Hiels.

Potts then leads Dick up to a cheery, clean-shaven elderly gentleman, a retired naval captain.

"This is Admiral Whiting, a rare good chap; though he's not much of a shot with a 'and gun, but they say he was a 'oly peril on the sea! It's all right, 'e's as deaf as a post and can't 'ear wot we're saying. Admiral," he shouts, "I want to introduce Mr. Phennell."

Before Dick's "How do you do, sir?" has penetrated to the old gentleman's faulty sense of hearing, he is whisked off to a pompous, red-faced little man who is deep in conversation about the iniquities of the War Office with Hugo Ellis, who is an amused, if not wholly sympathetic listener. He is Major Wriggles, who has just finished his service in the regiment garrisoned near by. He managed to bluff his superiors sufficiently to attain his present rank, but his inefficiency in that capacity soon became evident, and he was given to understand that he need not expect further advancement. Wriggles, sore at what he considered unseemly injustice, though inwardly recognising his own incompetence to the full, now considers himself a military critic. There was nothing too bad for the powers that be. He was prepared to denounce and expose them

to anyone foolish enough to listen. Unfortunate Mrs. Wriggles spends most of her life in a nursing home. Her only complaint is Wriggles himself, and consequently her condition is chronic; still, she gains some relief by this means.

Dick pays his respects to the Major and shakes hands with Hugo. Now Potts' voice can be heard above the general din.

"I'm afraid we may be a gun short. The Duke is prevented from joining us. He writes," proclaims Sir Joseph, unfolding a letter as though he were reading expressions of regret at the absence of some member from an annual dinner, "He writes that 'e's extremely sorry not to be able to be with us to-day, but he's been called away to attend an emergency meeting of a Board of Directors. 'Is Grace trusts we will 'ave a capital day's sport."

"Loud cheers," whispers Hugo to Dick. "As a matter of fact he has gone to shoot with a cousin of mine, a jolly good shoot, but he wouldn't make up his mind to go till he saw what the weather was going to do."

After a suitable pause Potts continues:

"Fortunately I 'ope to get a boy from the Barracks, young Collins, to take the place caused by 'is Grace's regrettable absence. I wish Collins would turn up!"

But as Collins does not turn up, it is decided to start without him.

Just as the whole party, including guns, keepers, loaders and dogs are mustered outside the hall door, the unfortunate Collins, who is a very junior subaltern, drives up. He apologises to his host for his tardy arrival, and explains that, as his own guns were in London, he had to send down to a friend who is married and lives some distance from barracks for the loan of one.

While he is talking to Potts, the second keeper takes out the case containing the borrowed gun and attempts to put it together, while everyone is waiting and looking on. Suddenly they become transfixed with interest and surprise. It is a gun, but what a weapon! Poor Collins! His friend's ridiculous soldier servant, who answered the summons for a gun, put in an ancient muzzle-loading flint lock that adorned one of the walls in his master's house.

The unfortunate youth is almost paralysed with nervous despair. Sir Joseph has just told him he is the Duke's understudy, and not only is he half an hour late in arriving, but he brings a weapon that he imagines must have been invented almost in the pre-Neolithic ages! To add to his embarrassment, everyone is a stranger to him except Major Wriggles, whom he honestly detests. He would give anything if only an earthquake would swallow him up.

Dick realises pretty well what has happened, and says, "Never mind, Collins, someone has made a stupid mistake; but I've got two guns; you can have one of mine. It will probably fit you all right."

Potts protests, saying he has some more guns in the house, and Collins is fitted out satisfactorily at last, feeling more at his ease.

Buggins, the head keeper, who has been waiting so as to meet the guns just before they reach the first stand, now comes to the fore, and as Potts has wisely relegated command of the function to him, he requests, "Will the gentlemen come this way, please, Sir Joseph?"

Buggins' plan of campaign had been based on the assumption that his Grace of Tumbledown would be present; consequently to-day he is opposed to the cut-and-dried method of the guns going up one place at the end of each beat. He prefers more elasticity in

the formation to be adopted by his storm troops. His Grace first, then the next biggest subscriber to Buggins, Ltd., must get the best stands, and after that each gun graded according to the depth of their respective purses. It would never do to have his Grace leading a forlorn hope, walking up with the beaters for an occasional bird flying back. Buggins is at first perplexed as to the identity of the Duke's understudy. It might be the Earl of Humpty Dumpty, heir to his Grace of Tumbledown? Ah, yes! That's who it would be, to be sure, he thinks to himself.

"Will you stand here, my Lord?" he says to the unwillingly created peer. "I think you will find most of the birds will come this way. I'm sorry you haven't brought a second gun, my Lord; if your Lordship wishes I could get you one, and a loader too?"

"No, thanks," replies Collins, dreading lest the old flint-lock may again make its appearance.

There is a good deal of talking before all the guns are disposed to Buggins' liking, who then blows his whistle to start the beaters.

Young Collins finds himself in the best place, wondering why the keeper insists on calling him "my Lord."

Sir Joseph is on his right, and beyond him 'Airy 'Eils. Dick is on his left, then the Admiral, with the other guns on the flanks.

For some reason in a hunting country the beaters are seldom so well organised or disciplined as they are in a regular shooting county, and the Kingsmede beaters are no exception to this rule.

Instead of coming on steadily and tapping the trees with their sticks so that the pace is level and the noise equal all along the line, a considerable amount of swearing is apparently necessary to keep the beaters in line, some of them shouting and some skirting noiselessly through the thin bits of the covert. No

wonder the cunning old cocks break back! If a fox is seen, the whole wood re-echoes with the variously pitched holloas. When a rabbit appears it causes almost as much excitement as would a tiger. There are loud shouts of "Rabbit cooming oop! rab, rab, rab!" and yokels dash frantically in all directions in hopes of clubbing the terrified animal.

Pheasants now begin coming over: Dick and young Collins, who are both very fair shots, are doing great execution, for birds are plentiful, but flying badly, as the ground is flat and they are heading straight for another wood just behind the guns.

Potts is firing fast and furiously, occasionally tailing a hen pheasant. Suddenly there are cries of "Woodcock!" from the beaters on the left. Here it comes, dodging through the trees, and reaches the fringe of the wood opposite Potts, who fires both barrels, hitting a brown owl who is silently flitting through the tree stems about three yards behind the woodcook. Collins bags the cock as it turns in his direction.

"That's onlocky, Joe! You'll never 'ave no money left you!" shouts 'Airy 'Eils, referring to the dead owl. "Just as I thought of making you sole legatee in my will, too!"

"Give over, 'Airy," retorts Potts, breaking out into the vernacular of his pre-prosperous days. "I never sits waiting for a dead man's shoes, least of all them yellow boots of yours!"

A real high pheasant sailing down-wind from the right of the line is greeted by a *feu-de-joi*, till it falls to Dick's gun, reinforced by rapid fire from the Admiral. As it drops near the latter he is prompt to claim it, making his average work out to one bird for fifty cartridges.

As the beaters near the edge of the wood, a cloud of low-flying birds and numerous scared rabbits come

out to be mutilated by the guns, while many more escape, some running, others flying back through the gaps in the line of beaters.

The Admiral has four shots at a runner that Major Wriggles has winged, and hits it with his last barrel, which still further improves his average.

Buggins and all his underlings now appear on the scene with quite a pack of golden retrievers, labradors and spaniels. Pheasants are picked up and collected.

"There's a woodcock fallen in the wood just in front of that gentleman," says Dick, pointing with his shooting-stick in the direction that the bird was seen to fall.

Buggins tries with a dog. "Hi, seek! Good betch—hi, lost! Was this the place, your Lordship?" he inquires of the mystified Collins.

"Bet that bitch finds him," remarks Sir Joseph proudly. "Won no end of prizes before I bought her—top price retriever of the year."

She stoops to pick up the bird. "Good bitch!" says her master encouragingly, as she reappears proudly with an owl in her mouth. No one claims the trophy.

"Never knew a good dog pick up vermin 'cept in his coat," remarks 'Airy facetiously. Sir Joseph does not deign to reply. Buggins tries again, and this time successfully handles the woodcock.

"Good betch! I knew she'd find his Lordship's cock!" he exclaims, holding the bird up in triumph. Potts, hoping that some of the spectators may think this refers to him, refrains from correcting his keeper's mistake. Consequently young Collins is safe for a good stand at one more beat at any rate.

This one is very similar to the last, except that the first animal to quit the wood is a fine dog fox. He comes out into the open and pauses for a second as he sees the line of sportsmen, then, hearing the shouts of the

beaters in cover, he makes straight for a gap between two guns, disappearing round a corner of the sunk fence in the direction of the shrubbery. He is an old customer who has lived long enough to appreciate the Kingsmede shoots. He will dine on pheasant to-night, and quite probably the night after, if Mr. Buggins and his dogs leave a few after the "pick up" to-morrow. "Quite a different class of sportsmen to those noisy, red-coated rascals with their vari-coloured hounds," he says to himself. "Not bad chaps these, at all!" His departure is heralded by all sorts of sporting noises: a bovine roar from Potts, "Tally-ho!" from Major Wriggles, a very creditable "Holloa!" from Dick, "Forrard away! Forrard away!" from Hugo, "Cheero, Charlie!" from 'Airy 'Eils.

As Dick watches the fox disappear he says to himself, "We don't deserve to have many birds over us after that, but our host was the first to start the uproar; no doubt his sporting instincts got the better of him."

It may possibly have been due to Reynard's presence in the wood that the birds came badly; indeed as many flew back over the beaters as came over the guns.

At the end Dick asks Palmer, "Have you collected my birds?"

"All present and correct, sir."

"What have we got this time?"

"Two cock birds and seven other ranks, sir."

The last beat before lunch is ideally situated, the guns standing in a dip much below the wood, which, more or less isolated, lies on the southern slope of a steep hill, thus necessitating a long flight before the driven birds again reach cover.

They fly so high over the guns here that an indifferent shot would insist they are quite out of range, unless there happened to be a real expert to prove to the contrary. To-day they are coming over with wings

spread out, coasting down-wind at such a height and speed that, in spite of the brisk fusillade, no bird even wavers in its course.

Then young Collins gets a right and left, to his intense satisfaction, and he feels that at last he has wiped out the unfortunate incidents connected with his arrival.

His success seems to stimulate and give confidence to his neighbours, as an old cock, falling a victim to Dick's second shot, lands with a thud at his feet.

The Admiral is opening rapid fire, shooting miles behind the bird he is aiming at and in front of the one flying after it—a system of naval gunnery known as "bracketing," in order to pick up the range.

The very last bird to come out flies into the Admiral's barrage, and there are cheers from all along the line, which the old boy is too deaf to hear.

At the end of the beat there are only twelve birds in all to pick up, in spite of the intense volume of fire that was continuously maintained by the guns.

"Now for lunch!" shouts Sir Joseph. "We'll shoot all the better after that."

A most elaborate lunch has been brought down to the keeper's lodge in a large lorry, and Vintage and his staff are putting the finishing touches to the table decorations. It's not a hot-pot-supplemented-by-cold-ham-tongue-and-cheese affair, but a regular five-course entertainment with magnums of champagne to wash it down. 'Airy had insisted at dinner last night that champagne was the only wine fit to serve at racing and shooting lunches.

The men hand their guns over to their loaders, and the ladies are beginning to arrive on the scene. Her Ladyship is dressed for the part. In fact Sir Joseph at breakfast had expressed himself as being entirely satisfied with her turn out.

"Most becoming! most becoming!" he had declared

" I maintain that a woman should always dress as though she were going to meet her lover ! "

Her Ladyship tried to look shocked, but if she once had been prim, many years of close contact with old Potts had entirely eradicated that defect.

" Reelly, Joseph, you don't suggest—— ? "

" No, Mother, it's just a *fashian de parlour*, as we say in Paris."

To-day she is wearing a maroon-and-yellow striped coat and skirt, which was supposed, according to her dressmaker, to give the impression of autumn foliage. On her head is perched a little brown Tyrolese hat, with a cock-pheasant's tail feathers sticking up on one side. Her short skirt discloses a pair of long brown leather button boots, which now feel uncomfortably tight with the effort of walking. Her heart yearns for the comfortable old elastic sides which Joseph had insisted on her discarding years ago. In fact they were given as a parting gift to the charwoman at Laburnum Villa, who may still be seen wearing them to this day.

'Airy 'Iels is struggling with a cartridge that has stuck in his gun when Lady Potts, with Mathilde and Diana, appear round the corner of the cottage.

" You know the Countess de Montreuil ? " inquires Potts of his friend 'Airy.

" No," says the latter, without looking up, and still struggling with the cartridge in his gun. " No, not from a ruddy grasshopper. Who was she ? One of the old Amphibians, Joe ? "

Lady Potts, who has never approved of Mr. Hiels, coughs with agitation, in the vain hope that she may prevent her guests from hearing his remarks.

Potts then proceeds formally to introduce the Admiral and his old friend to Diana and the French Comtesse.

Wriggles, who is a little way off, asks Hugo, "Who is that charming little *chic* foreign lady?"

"Oh," says Hugo, "you must be introduced to her!" Then, thinking to get a bit of fun out of what promises to be rather a dull lunch, he continues in a whisper:

"She is Madame de Montreuil, charming, but so painfully deaf."

He skilfully inveigles Mathilde to one side just before Potts introduces Major Wriggles, and explains to her that the Major is the deaf member of the party, so she will have to shout at him if she wants him to hear what she says.

Wriggles, the *beau sabreur*, is duly presented. He and Mathilde bellow their greetings at one another, to the consternation of their fellow-guests, and a moment later the whole party sit down.

Sir Joseph, who is at the end of the table, has Mathilde on his right, the gallant Wriggles being on the other side of her. Diana is on her host's left, with the Admiral next to her, while Lady Potts graces the far end of the table, with Hugo and 'Airy on either side, leaving young Collins and Dick to fill the remaining places.

Soon, perfect pandemonium reigns. Potts always talks at the top of his voice; Mathilde and Wriggles are shouting at each other, and Diana is vainly attempting to make the Admiral hear.

Mathilde, wishing to discover if Major Wriggles is still a serving soldier, asks him at the top of her voice, in literal translation of the French:

"Are you still *actif*, *mon* Commandant?"

The Major, who considers himself well preserved for his years and a great dancing man, though not quite sure of her meaning, roars back:

"Not so bad—not so bad! In spite of my many campaigns I think I can still hold my own with the

young men of to-day in a ballroom. More especially," he adds fervently, with a passionate leer of admiration, "if I should be so fortunate as to find in my arms a fair partner so attractive as you, dear Comtesse."

Mathilde is quite nonplussed at this reply, together with the loudness of his tone, which almost splits the drums of her ears, but she attributes it to the natural result of his own deafness.

"Ah, but you are too gallant!" she replies at the top of her lungs.

Wriggles continues his munching and crunching, at the same time ogling his fair neighbour, though disappointed at what he calls the "timbre" of her voice.

"Well, the vicissitudes of a soldier's life have taught me that Fortune always favours the brave, dear lady," he shouts into her ear. Unluckily, before this remark he had pitchforked a large piece of hot potato into his mouth, and the difficulty of pronouncing the word "vicissitudes" clearly at such close range and high pitch produces the most unfortunate results. Instinctively Mathilde holds up her hand to shield her ear and cheeks from further assaults.

"*Mon Dieu, quel homme!*" she thinks to herself. Nevertheless she vigorously resumes the counter-attack:

"All you English are so brave, and great marksmen too, is it not?" she screams back, raising her voice even higher than before, in the vain hope of keeping him at a safer distance.

Muttering "My God, what a woman!" the gallant Major returns once more to the charge, now cleared for action, having washed down the remnants of the potato with a glass of champagne.

However, her last remark referring to his marksmanship rankles slightly in his mind, being a most indifferent

shot, and doubtful whether she may not be possibly pulling his leg. Again leaning towards her, he replies very loudly and somewhat testily :

" My modesty prevents me accepting that compliment, madam, but I assure you that the roar of guns in battle has in no way affected my hearing."

" But you are not deaf, then ? " exclaims Mathilde aghast, regarding him with wide-opened eyes.

" No, madam, I certainly am not," replies Wriggles, looking equally surprised.

" *Ni moi non plus !* " she gasps, glancing angrily at Hugo, who appears to be deep in conversation with Lady Potts, though really listening with smug delight to the victims of his ruse.

It was fortunate that she could not hear Lady Potts at that moment inquiring in a whisper :

" Why does the Countess shout so loud, Mr. Ellis ? "

To which he replies *sotto voce*, " Yes, isn't it a pity ? But, of course, she's foreign. I often think foreigners do talk at the top of their voices, don't you ? "

Wriggles and Mathilde, both exhausted, stare at each other rather suspiciously, but we will now leave this interesting couple to make what mutual explanations they like, and turn our attention to other members of the party.

" How are you and Crusader getting on ? " shouts Sir Joseph to Diana amidst the din of voices.

The Admiral by chance picks up the message.

" Funny you should mention her, Potts. I boarded her as a snotty more years ago than I should care to calculate."

" I was talking about a 'orse I sold," expostulates Sir Joseph.

" How stupid of me : I really must be getting deaf. D'ye know, the other day at breakfast George

Dale, who is staying with me, said, 'I found your knife in my room last night.' First I thought the d——d fellow said my 'wife.' Couldn't for the life of me think what he meant, as dear Kitten was at Bournemouth with her sister. Then I remembered we had been looking for my knife all the day before!"

"Lucky 'e didn't say 'jack-knife,' Admiral," chuckles 'Airy.

"Why 'jack-knife,' Mr. Hiels?" asks Lady Potts.

"Well, the Admiral might have thought it was his black wife sitting in the room."

"Goodness gracious!" screams her ladyship, dumbfounded at what she imagined to be some terrible scandal, having missed the first part of the Admiral's story.

"They do say there is a skeleton in every family cupboard, don't they, Mr. Ellis?" she remarks, turning to Hugo.

"Hardly a cupboard without one in some families. Old Mother Hubbard would never draw a blank in most of them."

"Is it true Mr. Languid is thinking of marrying again?"

"Oh, I don't know! You see, he has a couple of skeletons already."

"I thought perhaps the Countess——?" she suggests, turning her eyes in the direction of Mathilde without moving her head.

"No, I don't think so. He has had two unlucky shots, and now he's what you might call a bit wife-shy."

"It do seem a pity he shouldn't have a son and heir too!"

"Ah, Lady Potts, I see you speak with feeling! I often wonder you haven't adopted a son."

"Now, I never thought of that," says her ladyship

with a sigh. "It's a nice idea. I have no doubt it would cheer Sir Joseph to have a little chap about the house."

"Well, I should have thought it would have been better to have had one a bit older than that Some promising young man, so that he and Sir Joseph could enjoy their sport together. Someone who, in your declining years—looking into the dim future, of course—you could lean on and trust; a real joy in your old age. I always looked forward to the time when I should have given that loving help to my frail old parents; but alas!" Hugo's face assumes a grief-stricken expression, "they're gone, leaving a gap in my life that neither time nor age can fill. My heart still yearns for a mother's love."

"Oh, Mr. Ellis, you do speak so beautiful!" says her ladyship. "I'm sure you never caused your dear parents a moment's hanxiety."

"Not one moment!" he replies—"but a lifetime," he thinks to himself, remembering the difficulty they had to get him into the Army by subterranean means, and the impossibility of retaining him there once he was in.

"You think it over, Lady Potts; but don't risk your hand on a young, unformed character—say something between twenty-five and thirty."

"But, he may marry—and then?" Her ladyship shrugs her shoulders inquiringly.

"Why, just think of the joy of dandling a little Hugo—I mean a little hopeful—on your knee! Watching the sturdy little chap growing up, later appearing in his velvet suit and buckle shoes!"

"Don't go on, Mr. Ellis! You've touched a mother's heart!"

"What are you two gossiping about?" shouts Sir Joseph from his end of the table.

To Hugo's discomfiture, her Ladyship raises her voice above the general din :

" Mr. Ellis says we ought to adopt a son."

" The very thing to warm the cockles of your heart ! " hazards the Admiral, having, as he thought, caught something about a drop of rum.

" I do like them nautical expressions," says Lady Potts, smiling amiably.

" You'll never want a hot-water bottle to keep your toes warm in bed after it," continues the Admiral, still holding to the rum line.

" I can't follow the Admiral's argument—seems a bit near the knuckle," observes Potts ; " but I daresay you're right, Hellis. When you thinks of this 'ere property and no son to leave it to, and then when you thinks of the years we De la Potts 'as 'ad the place, it's cruel 'ard ! Not that I intend to 'op the twig yet myself ! "

Diana has made several unsuccessful attempts to engage the Admiral in conversation, and is now saying for the third time :

" Those were very high birds at that last beat, weren't they ? "

" I beg pardon, Ma ? " replies the Admiral, who, having years ago given up all idea of ever catching a lady's name, had compromised by addressing them all as " Marm," this in time being further curtailed to " Ma."

" I said, those last birds seemed very high."

" Er— what ? Smelt very high, Ma ? " he inquires.

Poor Diana wishes to goodness she had never attempted to talk about the wretched things, but again makes one final attempt at the top of her voice.

" I said I thought the pheasants at the last beat were very high—almost out of shot ! "

" 'Pon my soul they were, Ma. Might have been

sparrows. I felt I was shooting in front of some birds and behind others, or possibly vice versa——"

"More like worser and worser," chuckles Potts.

"We only shot about a dozen between us," continues the Admiral, evidently satisfied with his own contribution, though his share, as a matter of fact, was one-twelfth of the total bag.

"Talking of smells," continues the Admiral; though no one had mentioned the subject, it was his common practice to drive a wedge into the conversation and thus ensure a hearing, "the other day Kitten bought a Camembert cheese and put it in her muff, and by mistake took it to a matinée we were going to. I tell you it cleared the whole theatre, drove 'em from the boxes, stalls and dress circle, though the pit were the last ditchers, and stuck it out the longest. At first we didn't know what was up. We both had devilish colds and didn't notice it. Then it suddenly dawned upon us, and in the end we had to leave ourselves to save our own faces."

"Poor Mrs. Whiting, I quite feel for her!" says Diana sympathetically.

"Ever since that I've always made it a rule that Kitten doesn't go catering before we go to a show," declares the Admiral.

"But I suppose the 'and that rocks the cradle waives the rules," shouts Potts, chuckling with delight at his own wit.

Disregarding this remark, the old sailor, having struck a line of his own, is determined to make the most of it. With him, one anecdote invariably begets another in never-ending succession. It naturally dispenses with the trials and trivialities of conversation and the difficulties of discussion, so tiresome to one afflicted as he is.

"Talking of shows," he continues, "really a most

extraordinary thing happened the other evening. Now that we have all finished lunch, I don't mind telling you about it. Well, Kitten and I decided that we would go to the Olympia Circus. It was towards the end of the performance, and a troop of camels were parading in the arena. One of them periodically persisted in making a somewhat unpleasant noise, as camels do—a sort of gurgitating hiccough. I turned to Kitten and said, 'My dear, that's a most remarkable thing. D'ye hear the echo? I've often been here, but I've never heard an echo in Olympia before.' However, there it was, first the hiccough and then the echo." The Admiral held his hand to his deaf ear as though he were listening, then, bringing his fist down on the table to emphasise his point, he continued. "But what was even stranger, the camels departed, yet we still heard the echo. I looked round and, would you believe me? the noise was really an odious fat boy of Levantine extraction being violently sick into his father's hat. I couldn't help laughing. Of course it was extremely funny, my interest and belief in the echo and the deception being thus explained. I must admit, too, that the idea of utilising the father's hat for the purpose tickled my sense of humour. I sat there laughing till the end of the show. I couldn't help it. When we got up to go, Kitten asked, 'Where's your hat, my dear?' 'Good God!' I said. It was *my* hat, not the father's!" gasped the Admiral, clasping his hands and turning his eyes to the ceiling.

Everyone burst into laughter, evidently appreciating the Levantine family's sense of humour.

"Anyone any more bubbly?" Sir Joseph asks his guests, looking at his watch.

Everyone refuses except 'Airy, who says he'll kill the bottle in the hopes that he'll kill Joe's birds all the better after it.

"Now for coffee and liqueurs to stop them 'appy returns," says the host encouragingly.

"'Sh, Joseph! Reely, I do wish——!" murmurs Lady Potts with a genteel shudder.

"All right, Mother! You've given us a hextra good dinner, and the Admiral can tell you 'ow the Turks show their appreciation of good fare."

"I hope you've had enough to eat, Countess?" says her Ladyship, anxious to change the subject.

"Yes, thank you, Lady Potts. I find you really eat very well in this country."

Her Ladyship is not quite sure how to interpret this. Perhaps I ought to have had the silver plates out for the Countess, she thinks. Or can she be referring to my appetite? However, taking it to be a personal remark, she observes:

"At one time I used to be a martyr to the indigestion. I couldn't touch champagne of an afternoon but what I would break out in a bath of perspiration, my skin is that sensitive."

"'Ave some brandy, Countess?" asks the host, determined not to hear any more intimate details of his wife's indispositions.

"*Merci, non*, Sir Joseph!"

"Oh, say '*oui*'! Just a drop to keep me company?"

"*Peut-être une larme.* Thank you, thank you!"

"'Arm! No, it won't do you any 'arm. It's the best money can buy," asserts Sir Joseph, filling the Comtesse's glass to the brim and turning to address the whole company. "We really ought to drink 'habsent friends'! Poor old Tumbledown! I 'spect he'll 'phone me this evening to say 'ow sorry 'e was not to be 'ere. 'E's so infernally conscientious—always puts business afore sport. One of the best chaps I know! So reliable—so reliable!" he repeats, as though pondering over the great qualities of a life-long friend.

Vintage having plied the company with cigarettes and cigars, they eventually rise to complete the day's sport. Potts and 'Airy are both pretty merry.

Dick advises Diana not to stand too close to them while they are shooting, and tells Hugo to warn Mathilde.

"What a lunch!" says Diana to Dick. "I feel quite exhausted after my attempts to talk to the dear old Admiral."

"Yes, the old boy talks so much more when his wife isn't there. He's rather like the bassets once he does start. Here, take my stick to sit on, Di."

"Will you stand here, sir?" says Buggins, coming up.

"Thank goodness we're at a safe range from 'Airy and Joe!" whispers Dick to his cousin, looking down the line and noting the positions of the other guns.

The afternoon commences with a partridge drive, and the day's sport is to finish with the shrubbery shoot.

Buggins, having discovered the identity of the Duke's understudy, now places Collins on the extreme flank, and Potts and 'Airy 'Eils are next to each other in the middle of the line.

They are standing behind a belt of young spruce and mountain-ash that is wired in, with occasional gaps through which an odd hare comes scampering.

Sir Joseph feels he is going to shoot all the better after his lunch, and has already brought his gun up to his shoulder, only to find it is a gnat against the sky that he has mistaken in his eagerness for a driven partridge.

"It's the quickness of the 'and wot deceives the heye," he remarks to himself.

Whirr! A flutter of wings, and a covey of partridges skim over between him and 'Airy, who exchange

rapid shots without result. Many are coming over on the left of the line, where Dick and Hugo are getting some good shooting, and birds are falling all round them.

A single bird comes over to the left of Potts, who succeeds in bringing it down; but his joy is short-lived. A hare comes galloping past between him and 'Airy. Bang! Bang! And Sir Joseph, who is looking in the opposite direction, bounds in the air. 'Airy has peppered the fullest part of his check breeches with shot, though, by some freak of fortune, his loader is untouched. Sir Joseph roars and swears and dances from one foot on to the other.

The unfortunate offender, now somewhat sobered, is genuinely upset, and runs to his assistance.

"Lor', Joe, I'm sorry!" he exclaims. "Sit down, old man, till you feel better. I never saw you in that camouflage suit of yours—I swear I didn't!"

"Sit down!" roars Sir Joseph, stamping like an infuriated bull, "I shall never sit down again—even if I live through the day!"

"Best get him straight into dry dock and have his——" but fortunately, before the Admiral has time to acquaint his listeners with the rough-and-ready methods of the Navy, the gallant representative of the sister service chips in with advice of a less crude but more technical nature. In the light of his vast war experience Major Wriggles produces some valuable suggestions, amongst others immediate anti-tetanus injections to prevent lockjaw, and a key down his back to stop the bleeding.

"Come on, Joe, let's see what's the damage done, and try if we can't get some of the shot out as soon as possible," says 'Airy, attempting to strip his friend of his stylish breechings, while the other men tactfully make a screen round their unfortunate host, with that

true British sense of propriety, quite out of proportion to any humane feelings they may entertain for his welfare. Invariably when such accidents do occur, first-aid assistance is baulked by a prudish observance of conventions.

Lady Potts has fainted, and the other two ladies discreetly go to her assistance as Sir Joseph is denuded

Sir Joseph bounds in the air.

of his nether garments, when half a dozen pellets are found embedded in the skin. Buggins now comes up, wondering why none of the last two coveys put over the guns have been fired at. As soon as he sees his master in his semi-nude condition he realises what has happened, and directs a couple of men to bring up a sheep hurdle that is fortunately at hand.

Sir Joseph continues to expostulate blasphemously, explaining he can't be any better lying than sitting.

From the male zareba surrounding him to the female

zareba encircling her Ladyship are wafted on the breeze strange utterances, "I tell you there's a 'undred . . . poulets . . . Godfry Daniel . . . 'undred rutty holes . . . bankside."

Perhaps it was just as well that the ladies were unable to catch the full details of what sounded to them like an eloquent discourse on poultry farming and husbandry being delivered by their host ere he was borne from their midst.

Eventually the hurdle is put on the ground, and he is persuaded to get down on his knees. He crawls on to the hurdle with groans, and, still *en déshabillé*, lies on his stomach. Two lusty beaters then proceed to carry him back to the house, while an urgent message is sent for the doctor.

It is quite a touching sight as 'Airy, with great delicacy, lays his coloured bandana handkerchief over his mutilated victim.

Oddly enough, this particular handkerchief was one of a set illustrating various sports; some were racing, some chasing, some yachting, some hunting. This particular one happened to depict a gentleman shooting a hare, and now, receding in the distance, it gives the effect of a Union Jack draped over the loaded stretcher.

"Old 'Airy is giving him full military honours," remarks Hugo. "Look! He's now marching in rear with his arms reversed."

"I should say it would make a good subject for a Landseer picture—'The Return of the Stalkers,'" suggests Dick, trying to suppress unseemly mirth.

"No game was ever worth a rap,
For a rational man to play,
In which no accident, no mishap,
Could possibly find its way."

quotes Hugo, watching the stretcher-party disappearing in the distance.

Then they remember Lady Potts, and walk over to where she is sitting recovering from the first shock, though still somewhat hysterical. A strawberry roan coil of hair has come undone and, slipping from underneath the little brown Tyrolese hat, it falls down her back. Though poets may sing of "A woman's crowning glory" and the seductive charm of silken tresses falling on soft white shoulders, so often the ridiculous overshadows the sublime. In this case the well-intentioned efforts of the other ladies to *recoiffer* the errant locks result in tilting the sportive Tyrolese hat jauntily on one side of her head. The plump, pathetic little figure now assumes a rollicking air; the effect is too much for Dick and Hugo, who bite their cheeks and turn away, vainly endeavouring to suppress their untimely hilarity. An uncontrollable sense of humour has its disadvantages at times, and both are genuinely ashamed of their bad behaviour as they catch Diana's disapproving eye.

The latter is vainly trying to soothe her hostess; Mathilde, on the other hand, is giving her a detailed account of the accident as she saw it.

"Sir Joseph," she explains, "was so tranquil till he received the *coup*, and then so courageous, he refused to sit down and be consoled, but up to the last he appeared so gay, so *débonnaire*."

"Oh, my poor Joseph, my poor Joseph! He may die of loss of blood! That hawful 'Enery 'Eils!" moaned Lady Potts, scattering her usually well-controlled h's to the winds. "'E'd no call to 'it my 'usband! I daresay he was using them soft-nosed bullets we used to 'ear of in the war."

"No, I assure you he wasn't," chips in Hugo, "he

was using number five shot. I found myself looking down his barrels several times. Besides, it was quite a good pattern."

"I'm sure he will soon be all right after the doctor has seen him," says Diana soothingly to the distracted lady, who is now misquoting from the Old Testament about Saul and Jonathan, in which her poor Joseph appears swifter than a "heagle" and stronger than a lion.

Supported on one side by the Admiral and on the other by Hugo, she is taken to the house, where they are met by 'Airy, who informs them:

"Joe's fine now he's had a brandy-and-soda—looks like a Crusader back from the wars."

"I 'ope the doctor won't have to operate with a knife to get the bullets out," bewails her Ladyship.

"Lord bless you, no!" says 'Airy consolingly. "He'll probably draw them out with a magnet. They'll come out like champagne corks."

"But I'm so terrified of complications—congestion of the lungs, lockjaw."

"You mustn't take on so. There's no shot within miles of his lungs, and as for lockjaw, I can hear him shouting for more brandy now. I must confess, though, when I first saw him jump I thought he was going to tower like a partridge. They say that's a sure sign a bird's been 'it in the lungs."

Poor Lady Potts, refusing to be consoled, is now handed over to her maid, and the party disperse, the Admiral disappointed at missing the shrubbery shoot and poor Buggins at losing his tips owing to the general confusion caused by the unfortunate episode.

Later the doctor reported favourably on his patient, after extricating all the shot but two pellets.

However, Lady Potts is unable to face a tête-à-tête dinner with 'Airy, who nevertheless makes a hearty

meal, and is in no way worried by any finer feelings due to the strained situation.

Having filled his inner man and thoroughly sampled the Kingsmede cellar, he retires to the smoking-room with his cigar to study the sporting papers. Later, with the aid of a second cigar and a large whisky-and-soda, he lies ruminating at full length on the sofa.

"Poor old Joe! It's 'ard lines him getting in the way of my shot, but one must take risks in all forms of sport—shooting just as much as racing. I don't fancy mother P. exactly dotes on me, but I can't desert old Joe now, it would be too heartless. Besides, this is not a bad shanty. I think I'd better put in a bit of hunting this winter. Won't take long to rig myself out, and Joe's horses must want a bit of work. These pellets will keep him off a saddle for a bit at any rate." He has another long gulp at his whisky, and then lies back and yawns, accompanying this facial contortion with a stretch of both arms, dropping his cigar ash on the sofa as he does so. "Yes, I think I'll stop and see him through this trouble. Wonder how he got on with Crusader? Rather think he talked about selling him at luncheon. I'll buy him. Might easy win a chase at the back end of the season if he's anything like as good as he looks. Nice couple of girls Joe had at lunch. Fancy I've seen one of them before. Old rascal! Kept 'em both up his end of the table. Don't blame him neither! Old mother P. gives me the pip every time I sees her. Looked like a cross between a canary and a cockroach to-day. Have to break it to her in the morning I'm not going; haven't the heart to leave poor Joe. Well, I suppose it's bed-time." Another yawn, and slowly rising from the sofa he selects a fresh cigar and puts it in his pocket.

He goes up the stairs, and hearing Potts snoring as

he passes his room, " Sleeping like an innocent babe," he remarks to himself.

'Airy finishes his cigar in his own bed, where he lies for some time fumigating the King Charles' Room, then, turning over, he puts the butt on the table by his side just before he drops off to sleep. It was a habit that he never could break himself of. He would always have a few pulls at last night's remnant next morning before he got up.

Soon he also is sleeping like an innocent child.

CHAPTER XV

"THE BIG THREE" AGAIN

During the following night the weather changed, though there were still signs of frost on the north side of the fences. However, the Rushworth were not due to hunt, and Billy Lines, who was some way off that day, reported that hunting was very doubtful, as they had had much more frost up there.

When Dick walked out after breakfast, a warm drizzling rain was falling, and conditions were promising for the morrow. He returned to the house and consulted the weather-glass.

In the country in England we take a deep interest in the weather, and it really serves as a more fruitful source of conversation than any other subject. Foreigners laugh at us, but we are in no wise upset by that.

Every man requires particular weather for his own particular pursuit. If, as Napoleon said, we are a nation of shopkeepers, we are certainly also a nation of glass-tappers.

Every British weather-glass is indeed long-suffering! There he is on the wall, or on the table in the hall, a real live personality, ready to converse with anybody. He prides himself on his integrity: never will he waver from the truth even to be obliging or tactful. How few men or women we can say that of! But Mr. Weather-glass and his brother, Professor Barometer, have a very high moral sense under a benign and open countenance. Then why insult either by tapping him on the tummy in the vain hope that he will tell a lie? Sometimes,

possibly from irritation due to continuous raps on this delicate part of his anatomy, he does tell a lie, and, like all good liars, he sticks to it, but normally he is above that sort of thing. How can he do otherwise? Everyone may want him to tell a different story, and if little baby W.-G. that lives in our dressing-room should err from the path of truth, we go and inquire of grandpa W.-G. on the wall in the smoking-room to see if he corroborates it. So he is bound to be found out. Nobody tells a lie under these conditions; it's the one thing that keeps us all more or less truthful. Now, Barleycorn on his farm has got in his harvest, and is pleased to see a bit of rain, whereas old Stubble, who has cut late and only gathered half his corn, wants fine weather. Each consults the oracle, but he cannot please both. Passtime wants to skate, Thruster wants to hunt, Bags wants to shoot; they all tap their respective weather prophets in the region of their appendix, but because they don't each get the answer they require, they abuse their honest little friend. If a thaw is indicated, Thruster may say "Good!" but not "Good old boy!" whereas Passtime and Bags will probably say, "The d——d glass is falling!" Why blame him?

On this particular occasion Dick tapped the dignified old gentleman in the hall, old enough to be his great-great-grandfather, and therefore deserving of respect. All he said was, "Good! I'd like to see it rain like h—l. The wetter the season, the better the scent in this country," and then walked out to the stables.

Lady Mary and Diana, coming into the hall a few minutes later, have a short interview with the old gentleman, but are too lady-like to play the devil's tattoo on his tummy as Dick had done.

"I love that old weather-glass," says Lady Mary. "He was given to my father by old Mr. Negretti, who was member for this division years ago."

"Yes, he is rather an old pet," Diana agrees.

The old boy radiates *bonhomie* from every feature of his open countenance, and wishes he could call the sun out in the afternoon to please the ladies.

"By the by," says Lady Mary after breakfast, while they were still laughing helplessly over the incidents of the previous day's shoot, "I suppose we ought to inquire how poor old Potts is?"

"I'll go and ring up now, Aunt Mary."

Diana, striving valiantly to suppress her mirth, runs to the telephone and asks for the Kingsmede number. "Hullo! hullo! Is that Kingsmede?"

"Yes, you've got it in one," comes the raucous voice of 'Airy, who happened to pick up the receiver in the hall.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Hiels? I wonder if Lady Potts is in? I would like to speak to her."

"Haven't seen her myself, but I think she's about, and I'll let her know. Miss Gibson, ain't it? I thought so."

As a matter of fact her Ladyship had only a moment before been in the hall examining a batch of visiting-cards. But as 'Airy entered, singing, "I love you in velvet, I love you in plush," she had retired noiselessly by one of the many doors, inwardly blessing the Land-rail plan of reconstruction that had provided the hall with six separate bolt-holes.

He rings for Vintage, who eventually informs her Ladyship that she is "wanted on the phone." In the meantime, 'Airy sits in the hall so as not to lose sight of his hostess.

"It's Mr. Hiels at the other end," Diana whispers to her aunt, with a hand over the mouthpiece, and trying hard to control her mirth, "but I didn't like to ask him about Sir Joseph. I thought it might be too sore a subject—probably for both."

"Hullo!" calls Lady Potts, in her most genteel voice.

"Oh, it's Miss Gibson speaking—Lady Potts, I wanted to ask how poor Sir Joseph is this morning?"

"That's very kind of you, I'm sure. He's still very poorly. The doctor says it's a nasty flesh wound. He didn't have a very good night. You see he finds it so awkward to turn over in bed, poor soul! But he's better since he had one of them round air cushions."

"I am so sorry! It was such bad luck! I was talking to Mr. Hiels before you came—he must feel it so terribly!"

Lady Potts is seized with an inspiration. She may, in the course of her telephone conversation, give 'Airy a hint that he is outstaying his welcome.

"Oh yes, Mr. Hiels is here, but he's catching a train to-day. Joseph's just asked me to order the car for him. It is sad, but of course he would hardly like to stop under the circumstances. I expect he'll catch the twelve-fifteen."

"Yes," says Diana, wondering at these unnecessary details of 'Airy's movements. She was, of course, not aware that he was in the picture, sitting, with a tense expression on his face, listening to every word.

"No, you don't, old skinflint! You're as devoid of the milk of human kindness as an old barren partridge. When us 'Eels wants, we can cling closer nor limpets. Talking don't shift us," soliloquises that sportsman, glaring over the paper at his hostess.

Lady Potts, warming to her work, thinks she may as well throw in a bit more without Diana listening to it, but in her agitation she puts her hand over the receiver instead of the mouthpiece.

"Yes," she continues, "as you say, it is so inconvenient having anyone in the house when there's illness. I quite agree the best thing would be to take Sir Joseph

away for a month—a nice change of air would do him a world of good. The doctor says he must have a complete rest and not see anyone—not a soul but myself. Then, of course, we would shut the house up and put the servants on board wages."

She takes her hand off the receiver and replaces it to her ear.

"Yes, I should take him away for a change of air," repeats Diana.

"Well, now, that is funny you should suggest it. I was thinking the same thing myself. Yes, I'm sorry Mr. Hiels has to leave us so soon, but of course he'll understand. Well, I must go now, in case he wants the car to catch an earlier train. Good-bye, Miss Gibson! It was so nice of you to inquire!"

"Good-bye, Lady Potts!"

The astute 'Airy was not the one to be defeated by this manœuvre: it merely put him on his mettle.

"It has just occurred to me," he said, rising from his chair, with an expansive air of solicitude, "as you might be thinking of taking Joe away for a change, and shutting up shop here."

"Now fancy you guessing that, Mr. 'Eils!" returns her Ladyship, with crude sarcasm. "It's just what I was thinking. After the shock you've given Sir Joseph's system, there's nothing else for it, although" —an ominous glint came into her eyes—"it does mean losing the pleasure of your company."

This was the kind of situation to which the pachydermatous 'Airy never failed to rise.

"Don't fret about me, Missus," he replies, with a magnificent gesture of self-sacrifice, "don't fret about me. I'm coming along with you. It was me as spoiled poor old Joe's beauty, and you can take it from me I aren't the one to desert him in his trouble." He shook his head deliberately from side to side. "No, no, I'm

going to see him through, and damn the expense. Poor old Joe!"

With the last sentiment Lady Potts warmly concurred. She began to feel helpless in the presence of the indomitable 'Airy.

"Oh, no, Mr. 'Eils," she protests half-heartedly. "Joseph wouldn't hear of you putting yourself out like that, although I'm sure I appreciate your kind attentions —intentions, I mean."

"Not a word of thanks, I beg of you." 'Airy holds up his hands to stop further protestations of gratitude on the part of his hostess. "The 'Eils' motto is 'Stick it.' You can depend upon me—I won't desert my old friend--I'll stick to him like—like a currycomb to a brush. Not another word! What I say is, give thanks where thanks is due. I assure you this'll be a pleasure as well as a dooty."

In desperation her Ladyship begins to hedge:

"Well, you see, Mr. 'Eils," she falters, "I'm not sure as the doctor would let Joseph travel yet, and of course you couldn't stop on here with him bedridden. It wouldn't be proper, so to speak. You know how people tattle these days—give them an inch and they take a heel."

'Airy's manner becomes the last word in urbanity.

"No, no, no!" he assures her. "Don't let that worry you. An old friend of the family, and Joe lying sick in the room next to yours. '*Honi soit qui mal y pense*,' as the French says, meaning, 'The key's locked on the inside.' No, it's my bounden duty to help you look after Joseph's affairs. I've done him a wrong, and I admit it; now I'm going to make amends. No one shall ever say as I deserted the sinking ship. I shan't be in your way. You'll have your boudoir all to yourself, and the rest of the house will be room enough for me."

Lady Potts looks like having another fit of hysterics, so 'Airy leaves her, muttering, "Put that in your pipe, old girl, and smoke it."

"Oh, Lord! I knew we were 'arbouring a serpant, not a 'eel," says Lady Potts to herself.

Though Diana could not hear this interesting conversation, when she left the telephone she had a pretty shrewd idea how the land lay, and told Dick, who gave it as his opinion that he would be inclined to back 'Airy at even weights, though one must take into account the sex allowance due to Lady Potts.

"I've asked the Baynham boys and Johnnie Weston to come to lunch, and they are all riding over together," Lady Mary told them. "You two must think how we can amuse them, while I go and see Mrs. Muir about something special for their lunch."

At about 12.30 p.m. the three boys turn up, riding the same mounts that carried them so gallantly on the Lossington Mill day.

"Hullo, my lucky lads," Dick greets them cheerily. "How's everything?"

"Oh, fine!" says Peter.

"But it's sickening we aren't hunting to-day," opines Johnnie. "It's ripping now the sun's out!"

"I know," Diana heartily sympathises. "What shall we do after lunch?"

"Oh, anything!" they reply, putting the onus of being entertained, as is the way with the young, on their hosts; and Dick has a sudden brain-wave.

"I tell you what!" he exclaims. "The going up on the gallops is all right; we'll have a steeplechase—one mile over fences; and we'll handicap by distance. One yard a week for age."

This proposal was carried with tremendous acclamation.

"Come on, then! We'll give the racehorses a small

feed; they won't have much time to digest it, but still——"

Old Stubbs takes charge of the animals, and the party repair to the house, where luncheon is ready.

By mutual consent of the males, nothing is said to Lady Mary about the proposed afternoon's sport, in case she may not welcome the idea. However, Diana considers it wiser to do so, and tells her that a race has been arranged to take place at 3 p.m. between the boys over the old schooling fences.

At first her aunt demurs, but is eventually won over, being assured that the remnants of the original fences would be mere child's play to three such doughty heroes and their steeds, and that where a determined sparrow could get through or over a fence, David's pony could follow.

"As a matter of fact, we jumped some of the fences coming here this morning," confesses Johnnie.

"Yes, my dear, but that is not the same as racing," explains Lady Mary.

"But we did race!" After which, further argument is useless, and she turns the conversation to scholastic subjects.

"There's an odd rumour that you've brought back a prize," she smiles at David. "What's it for?"

"For divinity," says the small boy solemnly.

"I don't believe there was ever anyone who didn't get a prize for divinity at Flip's," remarks Peter. "Even you got one, didn't you, Johnnie?"

"Rather! I told old Flip, just to pull his leg, that I thought of going into the Church."

"Oh, help! What did he say?"

"He said," Johnnie mimicked the master's earnest accents, "'No, my boy, you must not say that. Remember we are all members of the Church. You

mean that you wish to take Holy Orders.' So I didn't press the point."

"Do you remember," chortled the irrepressible Peter, "when Rawley major said no one could be a gentleman who didn't hunt?"

"Rather!" Johnnie grinned hugely. "And we used to be so sorry for poor old Spills, who was such an awfully decent chap in every other way."

"Oh, you disgusting little snobs!" laughed Diana, tickled at the absurdity of this outlook.

"I suppose we were, Di; but, mark you, we were jolly sick about it, because he was such a good chap in every other way, and we couldn't understand it."

"But you do like your Mr. Phillipson, don't you?" inquires Lady Mary of David.

"Oh, rather! He's a jolly decent chap, really; besides, he hit the clock at Lord's that time he made a century for Oxford in the 'Varsity match." That sounded rather an expensive sort of amusement to Lady Mary, but she saw it was clearly a praiseworthy thing to do. She remarked to David that she supposed they went in a lot for games at his school.

"Well, yes, I suppose they do," David admitted sadly. "One chap got six last term, and he was awfully unlucky to get caught out."

Lady Mary was a little puzzled.

"But I thought you played football last term?"

"So we did."

"Then I don't understand what you mean about one boy getting six?"

"Oh, I thought you asked if they went in a lot for *canes*."

"David, you are an ass!" pronounced his brother; and Lady Mary sought further enlightenment.

"You must think me very bloodthirsty," she said, "but I want to know how that poor boy was caught out?"

David, between mouthfuls, was quite ready to oblige.

"Well, Belcher minor——"

"Not little Girks?" interrupted Johnnie.

"Yes. He thought he'd ride Spills'—that's Mr. Spalding's—bike, and as he couldn't reach the pedals properly he ran into the pond. But he got it out without anyone knowing, and dried the bike with his towel, which got fairly covered with mud. Unfortunately there was a basket on the bike which had got a pink sweater of Mrs. Spills' inside it. Of course he couldn't get it dried. He thought of taking it to Cookie to dry, but he didn't dare to risk that. When the Spills went off to play tennis, I suppose she wanted to put on her pink sweater after playing, and they found the wretched thing all wet, and couldn't account for it, as it hadn't been raining. She was awfully batey with him. So when he got back the class were formed up, and Belcher minor had to own up, and Flip, who always does the caning himself, gave him six. He said it hurt him much more than it did Belcher minor."

"That's an old gadget of his," says Johnnie. "He always said that to me, and it was more or less true, as he only caught me once without my shammy."

"What's your shammy?" asks Diana.

"Don't you know what a shammy is? It's a round bit of shammy leather cut to fit you, and you wear it under your bags when you are going to be swished. It's a sort of shock-absorber, really. It doesn't show, or make a noise, like a bit of cardboard or a piece of paper. It's like a quack medicine—it eases the pain, restores vitality, and generally stimulates the system."

"I call that most ingenious! I hope you'll never want one, David."

"Poor David gets bullied too much at home. Don't you, David?" chortles Johnnie.

"Oh, I don't mind!" David gallantly assures them.

"Well, he's grown up a fine healthy lad. I shouldn't be surprised if he doesn't beat you both this afternoon," says Dick. "I've worked out your handicaps for the race. Johnnie scratch, Peter gets twelve yards and David a hundred and two yards. Distance, one mile. Prizes: first, a whip; second, a sandwich case; third, a squash racquet."

An ecstatic chorus of delight greets this announcement.

"By Jove! How absolutely topping! Thanks awfully!"

"Will and Cousin Mary will act as judges," Dick informs them, "and I and Diana will be the starters."

The boys are so excited at the prospects of having a real race, that none of them pays the usual compliment to Mrs. Muir's excellent cooking, and Lady Mary asks Johnnie where his sister is nowadays.

"She's still in Paris being sharpened up," Johnnie explains. "She wrote and told us she'd been bobbed by a Frenchman."

"I'm sure she looks very nice."

"Well, in the snapshot she sent us she looked just like a golliwog that's spent all day doing mascot to a racing car. Dad says she has got to ride side-saddle. I think that's what's keeping her from coming home, really. Still, I think he's right, myself; I've very strong views on the subject."

"My dear Johnnie!" says Diana, with amused severity. "If you talk like that when you are fourteen, you will be quite impossible when you are grown up."

"Oh, I only mean I don't believe in women riding astride, as a rule! I don't suppose I really know anything about it. I'm like old Mrs. Birkins in the village, who refused to vote at the last election because, as she said, 'she didn't 'old with these 'ere politics.' I don't hold with this here riding astride—I mean for girls, of course."

"Well, there are a few women who look ripping, but the others, I must admit, are pretty bad," observes Diana.

"Now I must go and get ready," Lady Mary announces when they have refused to eat any more. "You tell Will to meet me at 3 p.m. this side of the sixth fence; that's the finish, isn't it, Dick?" And with another qualm of anxiety, "Goodness only knows what your fond parents will say to me, boys!"

"That's right, Cousin Mary; Di and I will whip in the also ran. I'll go and warn Will."

The jockeys and race-course officials walk across to the stables so as to have plenty of time to inspect the course and get their final instructions. Excitement is intense, but once in the saddle tension is considerably relieved. Diana rides Crusader, and Dick his bay horse, Little Nipper.

"Now, boys, you're sure your stirrups are all right?" Dick asks them. "We'll have a look at your girths before you start. No whips or spurs allowed. You'd better come and make a book, Stubbs," he adds jocularly to the conscientious old groom, who answers gravely:

"If I have time, sir, I will; but I want to see your brown mare shod myself this afternoon."

The party first call on Will, who is delighted at the prospect of an afternoon's sport, remarking that he is afraid the fences aren't very grand, but hopes the young gentlemen won't mind. He goes off to the winning-post to assist her Ladyship in judging, while Dick shows the boys the exact course from start to finish, and they carefully examine each fence. After this they dismount and girths are tightened.

Now they are collected at the start. Johnnie is posted first, then Dick paces out the distance allowed to the other two boys, and all are given strict injunctions

to stand perfectly still. When he drops the flag they are to start, and if it is a false start, Diana is to hold up her handkerchief and try to stop them.

"Now listen." Dick gives his final admonitions. "Hold your horses together. Sit as still as you can. Go the shortest way, and don't make every post a winning-post, so that you'll have something up your sleeve to finish with. Remember, you've got a whole mile to go." He walks Little Nipper to his place and turns to face the boys with his handkerchief upraised.

"Now, then, are you all ready? Don't move! One, two, three, go!"

It is an excellent start; if anything, the pony gets off quickest. He has got a nice long lead, and the other boys have got their work cut out to catch him. Dick and Diana bring up the rear, keeping well back so as not to interfere with the competitors.

David and his pony are over the first fence, followed by the elder boys. All three are a bit sticky, and there is no appreciable gain on the leader. They are each standing up in their stirrups and going a rare gallop.

"I ought," thinks Dick to himself, "to have been more emphatic about going very easy to start with."

The leader approaches the open ditch. Jenny Wren props a bit, but not jerkily, then hops over the ditch on to the broken-down fence. David is thrown forward, but his knees do not leave the saddle, and all is well. The other two, locked level together, jump the fence knee to knee. Now they appear to be closing on the leader.

They are all safely over the third fence; horses and jockeys are warming to their work and fly it in grand style. The big boys are gradually gaining on David, and the pace increases as they gallop down the slight gradient to the next fence. But David is still twenty lengths ahead, sitting as still as a mouse and crouching

over his horse's withers in the most approved fashion. They are all safely over this fence, but Peter's horse stands off so far back that he is almost unseated. He's back in the saddle again, and all are going strong now, hugging their horses up the slope. Once more they are on the level again, racing at the second open ditch. This time Jenny Wren jumps it without dwelling, but Johnnie's horse hits the guard rail hard, which shifts his rider. Consequently he loses a bit of ground getting away from the fence, which enables Peter to slip on a length or so ahead, but he is on the outside, and coming round the bend Johnnie again closes up in the inside.

David's pony appears to be stopping, and the other two, now riding neck and neck, are stealing up closer and closer. Now they are barely two lengths behind the leader, just within range of the small turf-casts thrown back by Jenny Wren's diminutive feet. She evidently hears them galloping close behind her, and seems to put on a bit more speed, clearing the last fence like a National horse, with little David lying back and then sitting down to ride a vigorous finish.

But the other two are jumping the last fence, with Johnnie's horse only a length behind Jenny Wren, and Peter's horse's nose just level with the latter's girth.

Johnnie's mount gets under the fence and bucks over it in a rather disconcerting style, and he loses half a length at least.

"By Jove, it's going to be the devil of a race!" shouts Dick to Diana, as they come galloping across the park, cutting off the bend of the course.

They see the three boys galloping all out up the straight. Will the big ones catch the leader? It looks as if they will just do it. It's anybody's race—even money the field! But no! Jenny Wren is as staunch as steel, her heart is in it, and she is determined that she and her rider are to be the heroes of the day. It's the

blood of her sire, a champion in Galloway races, coming out in her. A real ding-dong finish! The grass turf cut up by the galloping hoofs is thrown far into the air behind them: first one nose, then another, is in front, jockeys and horses each striving their utmost to get the lead. Onlookers are unable to say which has won as they all pass the post within a length of each other.

The official verdict is, Jenny Wren wins by a short head, Peter and Johnnie dead heating for second and third place.

There are enthusiastic cheers as the boys pull up and return to the winning-post with flushed faces, and blowing as hard as their horses.

"Bravo, David!" they all cry, and the two vanquished competitors are not the least enthusiastic in their congratulations.

"Well done, Master David!" says Will, hobbling up to the proud winner. "I never want to see a better race!" Then, turning to the other two, consolingly he remarks, "Never mind! It couldn't have been closer, and they always say, though you can give weight, you can't give distance."

"Now then," directs Dick, "jump down and loosen your girths. It's no use your coming back to the house, or you won't get home till dark. Just lead them about while I gallop back for your prizes."

As he starts off he remarks to Diana that, at any rate, racing doesn't upset Crusader, who is quietly nibbling at a bit of grass.

On his return Lady Mary gives away the prizes, Johnnie and Peter mutually arranging to take the racquet and sandwich case respectively.

The boys are then packed off home with strict injunctions to take their horses back quietly, each thinking what a good chap Dick is.

"They're jolly decent people, aren't they?" says

David, as they turn out of the lodge gates and jog along the road three abreast, "but did you notice what awfully small grapes they had compared to the Pottses?"

"You shouldn't look a gift grape in the face," replies his brother severely.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RUN OF THE SEASON

During the next month or more the weather was unsettled and sport was on the whole indifferent. If we were to scan the hunting diaries of our friends we would find little of interest. Frost and fog not infrequently prevented hunting, and it was not till later in the season that things began to improve.

Crusader was out pretty regularly, but somehow he never got into a really good hunt.

On one occasion Dick took a toss over wire. It occurred when hounds were running across a farm that was known to be wired, but believing they were off the owner's lands, three of the field chanced a solid-looking, well-grown blackthorn fence, with disastrous results. A nasty strand of new wire about five feet away from the fence on the landing side was the cause of the trouble; all three turned over like ninepins. In Dick's case his horse was only very slightly damaged, though he himself was knocked out for several minutes. When eventually Diana came across him, he was rather unsteadily remounting, and instinctively she realised that he was considerably shaken.

"Oh, Dick! I hope you aren't hurt?" she exclaimed anxiously.

"Lord, no! Come on—we'll pick them up soon," he replied, trying to look as though nothing had happened.

Now, it is by no means easy to stop a man continuing

a hunt once he has managed to get up on his horse again. But as he started off in the opposite direction to hounds, Diana cautiously rode beside him, silently watching him swaying about in his saddle. She successfully shepherded him through a gate and down a lane, still going away from hounds.

"I wonder where they have got to?" he asked, a little thickly.

"Where what have got to, Dick?"

"The hounds, of course!"

"Oh, they're miles away by now! You don't seem to realise you were lying on your back for nearly ten minutes, and I thought you were naturally coming home with me, as we couldn't possibly catch them."

"——!" ejaculated Dick, swaying in the saddle. "What an ass I am!"

"My dear Dick, do be careful, or you'll fall off again. Stop a minute!" She caught hold of his elbow, alarmed at his appearance.

"But we can't hang about here," he retorted.

"Don't be stupid! You really aren't fit to go on. Your head must be buzzing like a bee?"

"Oh, a bit, but nothing to speak of!"

"Well, you're coming straight home with me. Do be sensible, Dick. You won't be fit to go out tomorrow if you don't—and we'll never find hounds now."

This line of argument gradually sank into his brain.

"All right, then—you're a regular little what-cher-me-call-it—it's like a sort of ferret."

"What *do* you mean? Weasel? Stoat? Marten? I hope none of them!"

"That's it! You've got it in three, and I only allowed you one guess. You're a regular little martinet."

"Well, whatever I am, I'm not going to let you out

of my sight." And without more ado she half led and half walked beside his horse as they turned for home.

Once having got her cousin tractable and obedient, she became quite motherly, treating him like a spoilt child. Later, telephoning for the car to meet them at the next village, she packed him inside, this time meeting with very slight opposition on his part. In fact, he was so drowsy and shaken that the now anxious little martinet encouraged him to drop off to sleep with his head on her shoulder, the bruise on his forehead just touching her soft cheek.

He was eventually put to bed, but, in spite of her precautions, he was not allowed to hunt next day, as he had hoped to do.

If we look up in Dick's diary for that day we read: "Hounds met at Addington; hear they had a good day. Got a fall, and Diana bullied me so I did not pursue further."

Diana's diary relates that "hounds found at Addington Wood, ran over Thomas Evan's farm, on outskirts of which Dick got a fall; behaved like a spoilt child and had to take him home."

. . . . . .

It was about a week later when Billy Lines' hounds were due to meet at Norton Priory.

The fixture is some thirteen miles from Rushworth, but owing to intermittent frosts having stopped hunting recently, Dick and Diana are determined not to miss a day if they can possibly help it, and judging by the number who turn up, it appears that most people have come to a similar conclusion.

Mrs. Carmichael, the present owner of Norton Priory, is a very eccentric old person, who, many years ago, had been a celebrated beauty. She had long since resolved that her fame should accompany her to the grave. A golden wig, shingled in the fashion of the day,

surmounted a wrinkled face made up with carmine grease-paint in a desperate effort to disguise the havoc of time. Though this deception was successful when seen from a distance, its illusion was entirely dispelled at closer range. It is more than probable that her unabated attempts to defraud old age had reacted on her brain. Though she had long since been confined to air and exercise in the form of perambulation round the garden in a bath-chair, she would talk of taking up tennis and golf, and even suggested that she really must start hunting again. The old lady dearly loved to discuss the latest fashions with the enthusiasm of a bride-to-be just off to Paris to select her trousseau. In so doing, she would work herself up into such a frenzy of excitement on this topic that her maid Wallop, especially trained for mental cases, would have to put her to bed. She would come in and say :

" I think, Madam, you ought to go to bed now, so as to wake up fresh and bright in the morning, or the roses will fade."

" Wallop, you bore me ! But there it is ! When one's young and growing one must have rest." And, escorted by the austere Wallop, the old lady would retire to her room.

Unfortunately the Priory coverts, once a stronghold of foxes, were now let to a shooting syndicate, and though the keepers were supposed to preserve foxes, they had long given up doing so. Luckily, old Colonel Sherry had bought a farm adjoining the estate, where a litter of cubs had been raised last year, and this, at any rate, was considered a sure find.

Dick and Diana arranged to motor to the meet and take Will with them, sending on Crusader with the latter's horse, and Goldflake and Duchess for Dick.

A motor gets us so quickly to the meet these days, that one has hardly got tucked in warmly when it is

time to jump out again and stamp about in the attempt to defy the cold.

Very different to the days when Whyte-Melville wrote:

> "Hunters are fretting, and hacks in a lather,
> Sportsmen arriving from left and from right;
> Bridle-roads bringing them, see how they gather,
> Dotting the meadows in scarlet and white."

The Rushworth car drops its occupants at Willy Green cross-roads, half a mile this side of the meet, where they pick up their horses and jog quietly on to the house.

What a crowd there is! And many of them we have not met before.

Who are the three super-smart-looking young gentlemen? They are what are known in Ireland as "buckeens," or "half sirs," three-quarter bred—that is, three parts coper and one quarter gentleman. They are locally known as the "Millchester Nuts." They are all captains, though one cannot remember their ever being in any particular regiment. The smaller one is Captain Flash. He is quite a figure in sporting circles at foreign watering places. Surely we remember photographs of "Mrs. Newgrass and a friend" at the Mal-de-Mer Polo Gymkana? But that was in bygone days. Now we read of "Captain Flash, the well-known polo player," receiving the cup for the winning team from Princess Rumbletinski; (inset, Mrs. Newgrass), winner of the Ladies' Egg and Spoon Race in the mounted events of the Caro Sposo Polo Tournament in the sunny south).

Then there is Captain Tommy Pushful, who frequently appears each winter in those attractive flash-light photographs executed at hunt balls, when even the dressy Pushful looks like a guinea-pig held up by its tail.

Nevertheless we understand that Tommy and his Charleston partner, Miss Mainspring, put up such a spirited performance that they were the admiration and envy of all, though some unkind person was heard to suggest that they ought both to have red ribbons on their tails.

The third gallant officer is Captain Charlie Sharpe, ordinarily known as "C. Sharpe." He also is seldom out of the limelight. Only last spring there was a charming photo in a well-known weekly of Captain Charles Sharpe and Miss Wetherspoon at the Over Riding Hunt Meeting, where the Captain rode Dumpling into a place in the Over Riding Hunt Cup.

Indeed, it is scarcely necessary to introduce our readers to such well-known public characters, but of course they look rather different now, as we see them in their new swallow-tailed coats and flat-brimmed top hats, worn on the back of their heads. This, of course, stamps them as hard nuts, as opposed to the purely social type of sartorial dilettante.

There, too, is young Wantage, who is just going up to Oxford. From his dress one can see that he is not in the nut coterie; in fact, he is wearing a pair of his father's leathers, that some day, in the dim future, he may possibly grow into. But it is a good combination —that is, a young man in his father's leathers—it is as good as a letter of recommendation. Nearly always it may be taken as a sure sign that he has been brought up to the business, as his father was before him, and indeed young Wantage is an excellent lad.

That lean gentleman in the faded coat and white cords is old Philip Down, generally known as Pull It Down, from his ever-ready aptitude for pulling down whatever obstacle a long-suffering farmer may have erected to fill up a gap. All his horses are trained to stand and wait while their master wrestles manfully with a stub-

born rail or upright stake that impedes his progress during a hunt.

The two hard-bitten ladies on useful-looking horses are the two Miss Swearwells. They are twins, and entirely resemble each other, except that the one known as Wear has retained her chestnut locks, whereas her sister, Tear, is close-bobbed. Unfortunately, out hunting the latter persists in wearing her shorn pigtail done up in a tight bun at the back of her head, so it is safer to introduce them together as the two Misses Swearwell.

Portrait of the Swearwell twins.

Ah, here comes Miss Devinia Bulkely! She is one of the few ladies who really look the part riding astride. She does not favour the rough-rider pose often adopted, nor does she look sloppy and *négligé*, but sits her horse with grace and ease. She looks so slim and neat and well-turned-out on her little chestnut, in pronounced contrast to Ariadne Wigmore, whose expansive and pillowy figure in drab, unromantic male garments, looks positively grotesque astride a pigskin. She is the wife of poor little Dr. Wigmore, the local practitioner, who welcomes the few hours respite from his wife's domination owing to her taking the field.

Here comes old Colonel Sherry with his son Bob, both looking a shade anxious lest this stupendous array of men, horses and motors may not upset the quiet leisure of any occupant of the covert on Bob's farm.

The stout gentleman in black, talking to that bore

Major Wriggles, is Bulgey Brown, the Secretary. He is evidently not listening to a word Wriggles is saying, and only waiting an opportunity to escape. Wriggles at last finishes his endless story with :

" What do you think of that, Brown ? "

Bulgey hazards the answer, " Oh, awfully good ! You tell the story so well, old boy ! " little realising that he was supposed to be listening to some harrowing details relating to the unnecessary abstraction of Mrs. Wriggle's appendix by some ruthless surgeon.

The whole of the Honeysuckle Hall party have turned up, also little Faucet, the solicitor from Marlesbury. Boss the dealer, Butterworth the brewer, Miss Snowball, the Duke, and a host of others from this side of the country can now be seen coming up the Priory drive.

A large Rolls-Royce drives up to the door, and from its spacious interior emerge our old friends Sir Joseph and his boon companion Mr. Henry Hiels. The former has evidently recovered, and, very appropriately, is riding Double Bed as first horse. 'Airy is up on a new horse Sir Joseph has bought on the former's recommendation, and no doubt a good performer, or that astute gentleman would not be riding him now. He is a slashing great black thoroughbred, called Chassepot, bred in France. Little was known about his early career, but when Potts bought him he was the property of an American gentleman who had hunted him at Pau before coming to England. According to documentary evidence, he is a maiden, and yet he looks a high-class race-horse all over.

Though 'Airy could hardly be called a pretty horseman, as he rides very short, he is certainly strong, and was at one time an artist at driving a jady animal home in a race.

He is on the best of terms with himself to-day, having

dug himself in at Kingsmede, as he expresses it, in spite of strong opposition from Lady Potts. He is wearing a cut-away red coat, a jugared top hat, cords, and half-hunting, half-racing mahogany-topped boots. The nuts are divided in their minds as to whether he is one of them, possibly a supernut, or merely an ostler relation of Sir Joseph's.

How money changes a man's outlook on life! Not so very long ago, 'Airy had seriously contemplated being apprenticed as a tick-tacker in the shilling ring, then a lucky stroke of fortune set him on his legs, and for the last six months one might say his lucky star had never ceased to shine. He is now an owner, and pretty confident, with a fresh start, that he will bring off a succession of coups, and already talks of a house-party at Ascot next year and who he will ask down there.

But we cannot hope to introduce our readers to any more of the still increasing throng.

As bad luck would have it to-day, poor old Mrs. Carmichael is confined to her bed. Ariadne Wigmore had called yesterday, and they had discussed fittings, fashions, flounces, frills and furbelows with such enthusiasm that the old lady had spent a feverish night, and was still very unsettled in her mind this morning. However, when the dour Wallop called her she insisted on making up her face, putting on a dainty bed-cap over her golden wig, and sitting up, with an elegant silk bed-jacket partially concealing a most engaging night-dress. The romantic old lady then declared that she was ready to receive all comers.

It is now five minutes to eleven: everyone is looking down the drive, and as they watch, three red coats and black caps, escorted by lobbing ears and waving sterns, draw nearer and nearer. The pattering feet skirt a puddle, then come filing through the gate, a rippling stream of heads and sterns that now breaks its banks in

flood, as the pack turn on to the grass and spread themselves, yet never straying far from their master's heels.

"Gently there, Artful, have a care!" says Tom reproaching a rather wayward young hound who is, inclined to run on from the others.

Billy Lines and his whips take off their hats in answer to salutations to the M.F.H., who has got the dog pack out to-day, which includes six and a half couple of selected bitches that run with the dogs.

Both men and horses look like business, and the dog hounds have that devil-may-care, independent look that indicates courage, eagerness and zest for blood.

Billy is fortunate, as he is undoubtedly popular as a huntsman, even as such famous men as Ralph Lambton, Thomas Assheton-Smith, Squire Osbaldeston, Sir Bellingham Graham, Sir Richard Sutton and Grantley Berkeley were in the past; but this is by no means always so in the case of the many who pay tribute to the shrine of Diana.

Quickly appreciating the size of the field, our Master decides not to give more than a minute's law before he throws off. He feels he may waste the best part of the morning drawing the Priory woods, and is anxious to get on to young Bob Sherry's covert, known as Green Leas, where he is pretty confident of finding. He gives a nod to Tom, who calls out:

"Hounds, please, gentlemen, hounds!" and they thread their way through the mass of horses, who clear a passage by which the pack is enabled to move towards the first draw.

Diana finds herself riding beside Sir Joseph, and says good-morning to him, and hopes he has quite recovered.

"Never felt better in my life, Miss Gibson," he replies, beaming on her with, as he imagines, that fascinating expression and irresistible pose of Franz Hals' "Laughing Cavalier." "And 'ow's Crusader?"

The Rev. Billy Lines and his hounds.

"He, also, has never felt better in his life," she answers, gently tapping his plaited mane with her whip as he jogs quietly along, arching his neck in playful mood and pretending to strain at his bit; the actual strain being little more than the weight of the reins, so light is the contact between hand and mouth.

"Well, I've bought another better than 'im. You'll see 'im out to-day," remarks Sir Joseph tactlessly.

"Oh, I'm sure he couldn't be better!" she replies heatedly. "There isn't a better horse anywhere than Crusader!"

"Well, this new one wot Mr. 'Eils is riding, Lor'! 'E's a beautiful 'orse! Pure black. Goes back to Carbine or some such 'orse. 'Ope to win our big 'unter's race this spring with 'im."

However, Diana would not exchange her beloved Crusader for a thousand pure-black horses.

"Joe's carrying two stone of lead," chuckled 'Airy to Dick, pointing at his stout friend with his whip as they jig-jogged behind hounds; "but it's evenly distributed on his saddle, at any rate."

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you know he's got to carry a couple of pellets with him wherever he goes for the rest of his life? The doctor said it was best to leave them in and Nature would adapt herself to the new conditions."

"What you might call 'Life's Handicap,'" Dick laughed.

"That's it," grinned the unabashed culprit, while Dick's eye ran over his mount.

"That's a rare sort of horse you're riding, Hiels," he remarked, after a careful scrutiny.

"Right you are, son—and a performer too. Joe wants me to ride him in the big hunters' race at Bickhampton this spring."

"Oh, really? Good work!" Dick regarded him

with even keener interest. "I'm thinking of running this chestnut mare there myself. She won a couple of hunt races pretty comfortably last year, so I daresay we'll have a jolly round together."

"Well, I shall know more about Chassepot after to-day, if we get a hunt. I told Joe 'Chassepot' ought to be a lucky name for his horse. Haw! haw! haw!" roared 'Airy, delighted with the pun.

They pull up with a jerk that reacts down the whole column as hounds reach the covert side. Billy puts his hounds in up wind, as it is a long, rectangular wood, with little undergrowth and no good lying for foxes. His exhilarating voice can now be heard cheering his hounds in covert, but although there is a fair show of pheasants, there is no sign of a fox.

The other Priory coverts are drawn, with no better results, and it is close on midday before hounds start for Willy Green Farm.

Young Sherry, who is now riding with the Master, tells him he is pretty sure they will find, as they had a couple of pullets taken only the night before.

They soon reach Green Leas, which is a wild, straggling covert of some thirty odd acres, that gives the impression of having planted itself. It is not fenced in, and the series of small, thick copses that form the whole are divided by grass glades issuing in every direction.

The Duke holds up the field at the end of the winding cart-track, whose tortuous route, skirting the various copses, traverses the wood to a hovel on the far side. The whips slip on to their posts, hound couples jingling against their saddles as they go, and the Master asks old Will to wait at the far end of the ride.

"Eleu in, old fellows. Eleu in—try!" cries Billy, and the dog hounds dash into covert. They are scarcely out of sight when Tomboy first challenges, then Rasper, too, proclaims a find, and a flock of starlings soar up from

the heart of the wood, wheel together and, executing some complicated manœuvre, disappear from view.

The chorus increases, and a hare scampers across a patch of open grass. Hounds hunt through the thick undergrowth, some skirting along the outside in the same direction as the hare.

"They're hunting a hare!" exclaims Captain Flash.

"Don't you believe it," says the Duke.

A few minutes later a hare is again seen in the open, scuttling away from the deep-noted chorus of the dog hounds.

"I'm sure it's a hare," affirms the nut.

"Not a doubt of it," comments Potts sententiously.

This time Billy, who is near, hears the remark.

"Well, you're both wrong," he grunts. The suggestion that his reliable old hounds were hunting a hare nearly brought from the reverend lips words more forcible than could be repeated here with propriety.

He is now standing up in his stirrups, with one hand on his horse's neck to steady his balance, and the other grasping his whip and reins, while his quick eye notes which hounds cross the open patch of grass in front of him. "No, old Harvester'd never speak to a hare," he says to himself, as he watches an old hound cross over, throw his tongue and disappear into the copse beyond.

"Yoic! Push him up there!" he cries, riding up the cart-track, squelching the mud in all directions under his horse's feet.

"Yoic! Try over there! Huic to, Driver!" he cheers, recognising another hound's unerring note.

For a minute there is silence, as hounds work through a patch of broom where scent fails, as is so frequently the case. Then, "Huic—tally-ho over!" from Will, as a light-coloured fox steals across the ride.

Hounds open again on both sides of the covert.

"I think there's two foxes," says Billy to himself as

he watches two couple of hounds feathering across a glade on his left.

A moment later there is a renewed burst of melody, and hounds from all directions come pouring into the oak copse, at the far end of which old Will is now standing close to the hovel. He puts his finger to his ear, and his shrill holloa can be heard echoing through the wood as he watches a fine, dark-coloured fox with a white tag to his brush now disappearing through the fence on the far side of the field.

As Billy joins him he points out where the varmint went, remarking, "He's a dark un—I think that's a vixen left in covert, sir."

Twang-twang-twang goes Billy's horn as hounds come streaming out of covert, and instantly picking up the line, they settle down on a scent that seems to improve with each throw of their tongues. Galloping hoofs can now be heard as the field come hustling up the cart-track, bespattering each other with mud.

"I believe that's old Will's holloa," shouts Dick, galloping alongside Diana.

What a mêlée! Horses bumping, men's stirrups and boots clashing and grating, some eager to get to hounds, others borne against their will at break-neck speed in the surging stream of galloping horsemen.

Once past the hovel, they begin to shake out in the open, pressing on as far as they can tell, in the direction which hounds have gone, judging by their cry in the distance.

Who have we here? There is Dick, 'Airy, two of the nuts, Diana, the Duke, Archie Languid, Miss Bulkely and the Swearwell twins, and half a dozen more who are clear of the throng.

We won't go far wrong if we stick to Crusader, who is striding over the grass in that effortless way peculiar to a few, very few horses.

Billy's horn can be heard again, as he is a couple of hounds short, and he is not sure that he has not slipped his field.

As Crusader clears the first fence like a swallow, Diana catches sight of hounds running hard uphill two fields away.

One of the nuts is now charging the first fence at the same place as the truant couple have selected, and

"We won't go far wrong if we stick to Crusader."

though he misses them, they scatter to either side for safety.

"Forrard—forrard—forrard!" The pack is racing up-wind, the older hounds vainly striving to wrench the lead from their younger companions.

Diana is over the next fence, Crusader spreading himself and landing, feet out, into the field beyond. Her pink cheeks glow with excitement and pleasure as she flies through the keen air, watching the specks of white and tan tearing over the grass, their joyful chorus floating back on the breeze.

Dick and 'Airy are just behind her, urging their horses to put their best leg forward if they are to catch hounds.

The third fence is a little awkward, as the ground slopes abruptly down to a wide ditch with a stout fence beyond, and the field on the far side is a good two feet higher than the one they are in.

Diana checks Crusader slightly with the reins, to which he instantly responds, and collects himself to get a good foothold as he takes off. As he rises she gives him his head, and he lands, putting in a quick, short stride, as though he were changing his legs on a bank, but he is really adjusting his balance as he meets the higher ground on the far side of the fence.

'Airy and Dick are over, and so is Captain Sharpe, though in the latter's case not too elegantly, as his horse scotched at the last second, nearly slid into the ditch, and floundered on landing.

Hounds now swing right-handed down the hill, for which our friends are grateful, as they clear a weak fence, cutting off an angle, which, however, lands them in a rough, undulating field.

The wise ones pick out the best going on the flat, though it entails a small detour, which brings them up to a stiff post and rails. Farther up the hill on the left, where Billy had struck them, they formed a quite insignificant obstacle, but here they are decidedly formidable.

Crusader cocks his ears, and without any previous warning from his rider, collects himself and bounds over them like a stag, landing on his near fore as light as a feather. He is straight away in his stride, having made no more of the obstacles, except for a strong hoist of his loins, than if it had been a sheep hurdle.

This brings them into the same field with hounds, and Diana gallops down the sound headland to the joyful

music of the pack, still racing ahead with a breast-high scent.

Dick and Goldflake are safely over the timber; 'Airy's big horse smashed the top rail, to the delight of Captain Sharpe, who readily takes advantage of its diminished proportions.

Hounds are now brought down to their noses over an unhealthy fallow, and the leaders can take a first pull at their horses.

"All on, sir!" reports Tom, who has joined up with the couple of hounds left in covert.

Once again on the grass, the pace improves. The fox appears to be heading for Gibbet Wood on the hill across the valley. Undoubtedly the evilly-disposed crows must have marked him down, for they are now forming an escort in the air, while their shadows accompany the anxious fugitive on the ground.

Dick and Diana are almost level with the tail hounds and wide on the flank of the pack, with Sharpe and 'Airy close at hand. Billy, looking even ten years younger, is away on their left. The rest of the field are closing up, though many may be seen scattered over the countryside a mile back.

To a close observer there is a great difference between the Rushworth couple and 'Airy and the Nut riding to hounds, even though there is not thirty lengths between them. The first pair have selected their position to enable them to watch the leading hounds as well as the body of the pack, a lesson they had learnt at an early age. They can now see the foremost hounds the instant they begin to check, and themselves pull up, while the older hounds in the middle swing and put the more impetuous members of the pack right. Riding behind, it is often only possible to watch the tail hounds, and nothing upsets a pack more than being pressed from the rear by the field, when even the

steady, reliable veterans may be driven far beyond the line. It has been said that hounds that won't stand being lifted are not worth hunting; but no hounds will stand being continuously driven over the line by a field pressing on their heels. As much harm may be done by those on the flank over-riding the line, if they do not carefully watch the leading hounds, and this they can only do from a position almost level with the tail hounds.

'Airy is none too fit himself, but the pace having slackened over the fallow has given him a breather, and he has got his second wind. But those still further back have had no time to ease their horses, as hounds are again racing away from them over the clean grass. It is poor fun hunting the back view of other red-coats disappearing over the fences in the distance, but that will be the fate of many to-day. There is evidently a burning scent on the big pastures over which this straight-necked fox is taking them. "By Jove, this is the real business!" shouts Dick to Diana, with a grin of delight, as they gallop across the ridge and furrow with the wind in their faces.

What a glorious view! For miles ahead a sea of billowy green, with the bare trees in sombre winter hue and the black fences standing out in the clear atmosphere. The River Wey winds its course through the vale and curving round the yellow osier bed that snugly hugs its far bank. There is but one patch of tillage in the landscape around the red-brick farm, where the plovers are hovering overhead. The valley beyond is out of sight, but the gap in the trees on the further ridge, where the main ride penetrates Gibbet Wood, shows clear against the sky-line.

But there is no more time to study the landscape, as the impetus of Crusader's long, powerful stride, though he is galloping comfortably within himself, soon brings

us face to face with the next fence, which hounds are taking as a double, each throwing his tongue as they own the line in the enclosure beyond. The going is springy underfoot and the take-off is sound. These conditions and the cry of hounds stir a horse's courage and urge him to a devil-may-care boldness that sometimes alone ensures success.

For miles ahead a sea of billowy green, with the bare trees in sombre winter hue and the black fences standing out in the clear atmosphere.

The fence that Diana comes sailing down to is a high narrow bank, crowned with a low, strong, wattle fence, a ditch on the near side and probably one beyond. She is not sure in her own mind whether they should steady down and try to bank it, or should she throw her heart over and catch it in mid air without putting an iron on the fence? Perhaps it was Crusader who made up her

mind for her. He feels so strong under her, so self-reliant, and at the pace they are going there is no time for reflection. Without a moment's hesitation, he takes off in his stride and clears the whole fence, stretching full out with his forelegs on landing as he sees the wide ditch on the far side. She loves him more than ever after that! On he strides to the music of the hounds, along the firm grass ridge of the next field, over a neatly cut stake and bound, with a ditch on the near side. Here there was no question of selecting a place in the fence, it was level and clean from corner to corner.

The field beyond is badly drained, and Diana holds her horse together over the heavy going, selecting a weak spot in the fence when she is about half-way across the field. It is a nasty, trappy place, with an ill-defined ditch, and she steadies down to a trot and pops over a gap about a hundred and fifty yards on the right of where the hounds have just scrambled through.

It appears to make no difference to Crusader whether he is going through the mud or on top of the ground. He keeps on in that effortless way, with no apparent alteration in his stride. With those deep well-placed shoulders, powerful loins, and that smooth, easy-going thoroughbred action, Diana need have little fear of the effects of the holding ground.

Sailing ahead over the billowy grass, with one eye on the pack and the other on the impenetrable-looking blackthorn fence ahead, she must make up her mind quickly where she will take it. There is a stile in the hedge, approached by a plank spanning the near ditch a little to her left. Surely Crusader won't be so foolish as to attempt to take off from the plank? Well, if he does, it is the end of this hunt as far as they are concerned. If he stands back boldly, all is well, as the take-off looks sounder here than anywhere else where the

fence is jumpable. She steadies him, just to get him in hand and perhaps as a caution, then, sending him along, they both feel he is right in his stride, and he takes off a clear foot from the plank, tops the stile, and lands safely, to the delight of his rider.

The pace was too good to look back, or she might have seen others who had been less fortunate than herself in negotiating the unpleasant obstacle.

There are shouts of "'Ware wire!" as the leaders approach the next fence, but a handy gate in the corner lets them out into a big, flat field of rank, rushy grass, adjoining the River Wey.

The pack swings left-handed, running along the near side of the brook and carrying the line round a pond full of reeds and rushes, where our fox, not long since, had flushed a brace of teal.

Look at them now, racing along the bank, so close to the river's edge that half the pack can be seen reflected in the smooth surface of the water between the pollard willows overhanging the stream.

The leading hounds flash on, then suddenly throw up their heads, having over-run the scent, but Valiant, Tomboy and Reveller hold to the line, swinging right-handed round the bend of the river and down to the brink of the water. In they plunge, soon followed by the rest of the pack. Scrambling out on the far side, they drive on with a fine cry, leaving Netherwey Osiers on their right and heading for Redpole Farm.

"Forrard! forrard! forrard!" is still the cry, but the flooded, turgid stream now separates hounds and horses. It is a case of in with a ducking or over with luck. "Smooth glides the water where the brook is deep."

Diana and those who had been riding along the bank in the wake of hounds have pulled up to let the pack swim across. Once they are over it is their turn to follow.

No one likes the look of it, as, in addition to being wide, the sides sloping down to the water's edge are muddy and holding. But with hounds running on and no bridge in sight there is no alternative.

Captain Flash, Dick, 'Airy, Diana, Billy and one of his whips all have a go at it.

Flash's horse, a whistler, though of course it does not stop him, according to his owner, halts dead on the brink; the sloping, slushy bank will not hold his fore-feet, and in they go. For two seconds only a top hat can be seen floating in midstream, then the nut re-appears, blowing and spitting.

Dick and 'Airy both get over with difficulty, Chasse-pot pecking badly on landing, and his jockey, hunched up on his withers, rolls off, but both are on the right side and soon up again.

Billy's liver chestnut drops his hind legs in, but our Master is off in a second and holding his horse's head by the rein, while the gallant animal makes several plunges in vain. Eventually, with one last heroic effort, he drags his hind legs on to the firm ground, where he stands frightened and blowing. He is covered with black, slimy mud from girth to croup, and yet his dripping tail perhaps enhances the graceful curves of his thighs and quarters.

Crusader gets over, but Diana can feel him making a desperate effort as his hind feet and fetlocks, hampered by the suction of the sticky mud, can find no sure foot-hold as he straightens his hocks to jump. At first she is anxious lest he should have sprung a curb or wrenched a joint, but as he stretches himself over the rolling grass he gives her the impression of being able to go on all day, and she is somewhat reassured.

"Precious angel! I'd never forgive myself if anything happened to him," she thinks to herself as she gallops on after the fast-running pack.

Some one knows of a ford half a mile up-stream, where the cattle drink, and the remainder of the field gratefully avail themselves of this information as they see the unfortunate young Wantage plunge in and out. Still, in spite of a dripping coat and slimy leathers, he is quite happy, as he and his horse are on the right side of the stream.

The advanced brigade, still further reduced in numbers, keep galloping on, and soon reach Redpole Farm, which hounds leave on their right.

Someone opens the gate, and as they clatter through the farm, past the two ricks, distraught poultry rush wildly in every direction; infuriated geese, at first retreating as far as their dignity permits, return to make a gallant counter-attack against the intruders; children run out to gaze over the railings of the little farm garden at the gentlemen in red-coats, and a lady too; a litter of young pigs, tumbling over each other, dash grunting into a corner, from where they can view without danger the wild men and horses. It's a red-letter day for the inmates, and added to the din and general pandemonium is the frenzied barking of a shaggy, wall-eyed bob-tail, which only ceases in response to the summons of his master. This is Mr. Barleycorn, who opens the gate out of the farm, telling Billy, as he does so, that he thinks he saw the fox run through the sheep on the hill, and asks them to keep aside of the clover seed beyond the plough, and hopes they'll kill their fox.

Billy thanks him, and trusts that Mrs. Barleycorn and the last little Barleycorn are doing well.

As they emerge through the gate they see the hounds now running over the grass on their left.

Away they gallop and, landing over the next fence, a big drop from grass on to plough, Crusader pecks, but rights himself again. As they ride up a wet furrow he throws the mud back with his hind feet on to Chasse-

pot and his rider, who are following on his heels. Scent is colder on the plough, but hounds carry the line through the fence on to the seed field, where the pace again mends.

"Steady on, please! 'Ware seed!" shouts Billy, turning at the same time for the gate in the corner. The field turn with him, and Dick unlatches the gate and holds it open for the Master. They all press through and ride alongside the fence to avoid doing damage.

Everyone jumps out at the corner, each waiting his turn, which is an easy matter at this period of the hunt, though very different if it had been the first fence, when excited riders chip in and baulk each other, impetuous horses are irritable at the delay, and much mutual abuse drowns the rapidly diminishing cry of hounds.

The next field is full forty acres of grass, rising steeply to the Wenby Road, with a clump of ash standing on a hillock in the centre.

The pace further improves on the grass, and the pack run fast up the hill close to the fence on the left, each hound now striving and racing for mastery.

Suddenly they check, but casting on, first Rapid has it, then Valiant and Gameboy give tongue, and the body of the pack join them and hunt tenaciously up the hill and over the Wenby Road. At the same time a flock of sheep can be seen in the corner of the field, all gazing the same way, and drawn up like a troop of cavalry rallying after the charge.

The field all close up left-handed, leaving the clump wide on their right, to avoid the steep gradient. They arrive more or less simultaneously at the gate in the corner of the field, their horses blowing and with flanks heaving from the exertion of their gallop up the rising slope. Meanwhile, the hounds, having crossed the road, now run on parallel to it as it curves into Wenby. Soon they disappear over the brow of the hill, turning

short left-handed and leaving the village on their right.

Young Wantage gets off to lift open the heavy gate, letting the Master through, while the others, except 'Airy, wait for him to remount.

"I'm all right—don't wait, please!" the lad vainly exhorts them, as he climbs back into the saddle.

Once up, they all bear right-handed and canter down the grass sides of the road, as they last saw hounds swing and run parallel to it. Turning left-handed into Wenby, they hold back to a steady trot, finding themselves on slippery tarmac, and clatter through the village, with its grey-stone, thatched-roofed cottages on either side. The occupants run to the street doors, and children cheer lustily; red faces bob up and stare out from the window of the bar parlour of the "Green Dragon." Jim Bindle, the poacher, and late owner of Spider, dashes out, wiping a frothy moustache on the back of his hand. He is a sportsman at heart, and cannot resist an afternoon like this. Besides, he's got a good "tarrier" the Master might buy. In fact, Jim's livelihood, except for a bit of harvesting in summer and a bit of poaching most other times, is mainly derived from dog-rearing. So he and his varminty little short-legged terrier bitch, who answers to the name of "Sal," start to run after the trotting horses, whose iron-shod feet can scarce hold the road down the hill beyond the village.

Though hounds are out of sight, their note, carried back on the wind, can just be heard in spite of the hammer, hammer, hammer of hoofs on the slippery tarmac. At the foot of the hill the road forks, and Billy takes the left and then pulls up, raising his hand to stop the others, who draw rein amidst a cloud of steam from the sweating horses.

The music has ceased, but hounds can be seen in the

field on their left with noses down, searching for the line. A panting collie dog jumps on to the road from the opposite side.

"That's the trouble," thinks Billy.

Next moment Rhapsody and Harlequin crash on to the fence, then feather down the road for a few yards; first a quivering whimper and then a fuller note, as they force their way through a gap in the opposite thorn fence. The nearest hounds scramble into the road, and Billy's horn rallies the remainder of the pack.

"Yoi, over, over! Yoic over, over, over!" he cries, waving his arm in the direction of the gap.

Once the road is clear the horsemen canter on and turn through a gate on their right into the field, where hounds are again warming to the line.

The country now changes. Instead of the large grass fields there are small enclosures bounded by banks, with a stubbly growth on the top of each.

Gradually the pack get on better terms with their fox, though they are unable to drive on with the same dash and confidence that have characterised the hunt up to Wenby Hall.

It is as well that the field has been so much diminished ere they reached this cramped country. In the big open pasturelands it was possible for a large field to ride fairly wide of hounds, but with these small enclosures they must necessarily keep closer to them.

As Diana approaches the first bank, crowned with a straggly hedge, she wonders how Crusader will take it. Blood horses, with thin, sensitive skins, dislike being scratched, and yet to place a foot on the bank looks a thorny, uncomfortable operation. She cannot risk flying it, so she brings him slowly up to where she sees the fence on top looks weak. He tips up his forehand, then propels himself on to the bank, first placing his forelegs on the top growth which seems to clear a way

for his hind limbs, which also come down on the fence, making a gap through which others can easily follow. He then springs off and over the ditch beyond, in a way that does credit to his early schooling and still further increases his rider's confidence.

Hounds hunt steadily on over the next few fields, and the leading two couples are now scrambling over a big, solid grass bank with a post and rails along the top. It is no great obstacle to hounds, but a puzzler for the riders, most of whose horses are unaccustomed to the type of country in which they now find themselves.

Hounds are all over, and in their cry rings a note of challenge as they swing into the wind at an increased pace. There is only one gate on the opposite side of the field, and this unpleasant obstacle bars the way. Fortunately Diana now has entire confidence in Crusader, and, like other good horses, he dislikes falling as much as his rider. The question is, whether there is room on the top of the bank for him to take off and pop over the rails, then, having done so, to land safely and change his legs on the far side so as to jump off and clear the ditch beyond. The problem is not easy to solve in theory, but even more unpleasant in practice.

"Jump after me, Di!" shouts Dick over his shoulder. "The odds are I'll break the top rail."

Goldflake, who is as clever as a cat, is presented at the fence with only a few yards' run, but with a free head. She jumps on to the top of the bank, alighting barely a foot from the rails, collects herself there, then pops over them, landing close under the fence on her forelegs, so that her hind feet, coming down next, are placed ready to give her a push off the bank. Finally she springs out in the far field well clear of the ditch.

Crusader follows suit in almost the same manner, except that he scarcely appears to touch the far side of the bank with his fore-legs, he is so quick kicking back

with his hind, and shoots, like a stone from a catapult, yards out into the next field.

"Well done, Di!" shouts Dick joyously as she catches him up. "I think I've got the legs of old 'Airy's horse, but—as he said to me just now—we neither of us could touch you on Crusader, if it came to racing."

"Oh, Dick, isn't it glorious? I've never enjoyed myself so much before!" Diana's eyes are fairly

"Thanks to young Wantage."

dancing with the exhilaration of a splendid hunt, and seeing every yard of it.

Though there was some trouble and grief before all our friends got over, they each negotiated the nasty place eventually, thanks to young Wantage, who crashes, and clears away the top rail, to the relief of those behind him. They subsequently regain hounds, who have checked on the Watcombe–Millchester turnpike. The dog hounds first carried the line right-handed up the road just beyond the milestone, and then threw up, where two men at work informed Billy that they saw the

fox running away from them, and then disappear round the bend.

"Headed, and doubled back on his own line," he thinks to himself.

A short blast on the horn, "Low back, lope! Low back, lope!" and he turns his horse's head and tries back along the road, encouraging hounds to investigate the far side of it, as he is pretty sure his fox is making for Gibbet Wood.

A couple of hounds dwell on their noses near a gap in the fence.

"Yeuic—try over there!" cheers the Master, and Vanguard confirms the success of his investigations with a note of triumph, forcing his way through the fence where the fox had turned in to make his point.

The rest tumble over each other in their eagerness, and when through, piloted by old Vanguard, they industriously pick out the line across the next field.

As Billy jumps in after them, he sees a man, on the rising ground beyond, holding up his hat, but he lets his hounds hunt out the line themselves, and rightly, as they are settling down on an improving scent, and he has no desire to risk changing foxes.

However, as information may always be valuable, Tom stops to ask the man what he has seen.

"The dogs be right," says the man. "I sees the fox go over the bottom and up yon hill into Gibbet Wood. He's not long afore ye—about four or five minutes."

"Right!" says Billy, on receipt of this information, knowing full well that a countryman's idea of time is seldom reliable.

First hounds and then the field sail over a rather nasty bottom, the former racing up the hill on the far side and into Gibbet Wood.

The ride through the wood is both holding and steep,

and horses are brought to walking pace, only occasionally trotting where the going is better, encouraged by the cheering cry of the hounds, who carry the line, almost without check, diagonally across the wood.

Some men who are working there are surprised to see hounds to-day. They haven't seen a fox, and they've been there since morning. In fact they lit the fire that is still smouldering, soon after twelve.

Hounds emerge at the top end of the wood, and cross the road running parallel to the side of it, but on the plough beyond they can scarcely own the line.

At this period quite a number of the field, who, more through luck than judgment, have made for Gibbet Wood, chip in on the road. Owing to the pace hounds have been running the greater part of the time and the small number of followers with them, information as to their movements had been difficult to obtain.

Poor old Potts had been singularly unfortunate in striking the inevitable strangers in these parts and others hard of hearing—those tiresome incidents that invariably befall a man who is thrown out of a hunt.

As the new arrivals appear on the scene, hounds definitely check, and are now making their own cast into the wind, after which the Master is prepared to help them.

Four and a half couple are feathering down a furrow, and one young hound throws his tongue. The Master, quick to read his hounds, and instantly recognising that there are no third- or fourth-season veterans amongst them, can afford to disregard these signals. Being as anxious as his hounds for blood, he is delighted at this moment to hear some boys holloaing at the top of their voices, as the pack is now at a loss, and a hare, scuttling down a furrow in the same field as them, does not help matters.

"Huic holloa! Huic holloa!" Tom gallops off to

the holloa, and on hearing that they had seen a dark-coloured fox that looked very tired disappear down the steep grass slope in the direction of the railway, he holds up his cap.

Billy blows his horn, and, asking Dick to put hounds to him, gallops to the holloa, taking a weak hazel-and-privet hedge by the roots as he goes.

"Where'd he go? Where'd he go?" he calls out to Tom.

"Just past them oaks down the hill, sir."

He steadies up to a trot, stops about a hundred yards short of the trees indicated, and then stands still, with his horse facing in the same direction as the fox has taken. His hounds cast on over the grass in front of him. A whimper! Vanquisher has it! Billy's soft "Yuip! Yuip!" of encouragement can just be heard; occasional notes now break into full chorus, accompanied by the Master's "Yuip! Yuip! Yuic!" in crescendo, cheering them on, as they start racing down the grassy slope.

"Forrard! Forrard together, my beauties!" he cries, inwardly rejoicing that he has not lost more time at this critical period of the hunt.

On come the field, slipping and sliding down the steep hill, cutting long strips out of the green turf with their hind shoes, and reaching the railway just as hounds burst over the big grass enclosure beyond on the Rickborough estate.

Tom has dismounted and is unlocking the gates on each side of the railway crossing, while someone leads his horse over for him. They then scramble down, and up the sides of a small valley dotted with gorse bushes, known as Rickborough Dell, where they get a view of the house in the distance.

The landscape again changes. They are now in big, open pastures, and the country is dead flat and

well fenced. But if the fences are big, the going is good, and the fit horses have recovered from their exhausting gallop up the hill and their weary efforts through the heavy going in Gibbet Wood.

Crusader comes galloping up to a stiff fence with an ox rail standing on the near side. What a glorious feel he must have given his rider as he cleared it like a steeplechase horse jumping a regulation open ditch! But in his case he must have had a good foot to spare, yet never dwelling for an instant.

They then pop in and out of a double flight of rails with a weak hedge growing between, where Diana had wisely held him back to a collected canter, so that he should not jump out too far over the first, and thus have to take off immediately under the second rails.

On the other hand, the very next fence demands ample speed to clear the whole, as it consists of a quickset fence with rails beyond, and over this they sail without checking.

It is indeed sheer joy to ride a horse that can so easily be put at his fences, fast or slow, as the rider wills, without any apparent effort on the part of either!

The big grass fields evidently carry a good scent, as hounds and horses, racing over them, soon reach Rickborough Park. The entrance gates are already opened for them, and they gallop along the grass ride beside the avenue of giant elms. Hounds run close to the house, and though the family are away, the rest of the household, headed by the butler in a green baize apron, rush out on to the lawn to see the hunt.

"*Mon Dieu! quelle famille!*" ejaculates Madame Bignon, the stout French cook, seeing a pack of hounds for the first time in her life, as they run through the pleasure grounds past the bottom end of the lake, putting up some home-reared wild duck who have been shot at so often this winter to justify their name.

Though hounds can drive on, it is not such plain sailing for the field, as the paths run in all but the required direction. They are forced to leave the rides and push through a plantation of close-growing shrubs, and those behind must look out for catching a smack in the eye from a branch that every now and then comes back with a swish as the man in front relinquishes his hold of it.

The leaders now jump out over a sunk fence, but many of the weary horses can be seen with heads stretched out over the masonry that supports the steep edge of the fence, unable to summon their courage to face the drop. The frantic efforts of their riders fail to inspire them with the necessary enthusiasm to attempt the ordeal; they hover on the brink like bathers shrinking from the first plunge into cold water. Then one, bolder than the rest, makes an effort, and lands with a grunt. He is followed by others, but many more are forced to turn back and find a gate on the far side of the lake that leads into the park.

Those who can still raise a gallop must do so now, as the punishing speed at which hounds are running allows for no straggling. "What a stout-hearted fox this must be! Surely," they think, "we must have changed in Gibbet Wood?"

They run through a spinney bordering the road beyond the park, cross the road, then, skirting the village of Rickborough, which they leave just on their right, they disappear from view.

The field take advantage of the park gates, and selecting the road through the village, which leads in the right direction, they push on to the far end of the buildings. It is almost certain that the fox will have made for the wood, known as Willoughby Clump, on the right of the road beyond the village, in which case he must have crossed the road they are on now. It is just possible he

may have swung left-handed for Ashford Grove, almost a mile further on.

Billy and those with him wait and listen, his second whip having already ridden on in the direction of Willoughby Clump. Then the Master's quick eye spots hounds through a gate a couple of fields away, hunting towards Ashford Grove.

Off they gallop, and as they get on the grass they hear their music, though they cannot now see them.

Helter skelter through a gate, over some small rails, and they are rewarded by seeing the whole pack running along the fence on the far side of the field.

Diana turns Crusader and jumps the fence on the right at the same time as the tail hounds clear it in the far corner.

As she lands she sees a little, tired, dark-coloured fox gamely struggling on in the same field as hounds. He is scrambling over the far fence, now he falls back into the ditch, but the cry of his pursuers half a field away must have nerved him again to make another effort; this time he succeeds and disappears through the hedge.

She does not say a word. In her heart of hearts she hopes this gallant fox may yet escape.

However, she is not the only one to see him. Tom, with an eye like a hawk, caught sight of him, and is now galloping on in hopes of heading him back from the wood, where the earths will certainly be open. His one idea is to help his Master and assist hounds who so well deserve their fox. After all, a fox lives and dies by hunting!

Crusader jumps the next fence as big as if he had only lately joined in the hunt, in that way peculiar to really great stayers, and the others scramble through as best they can.

Hounds are getting closer and closer to their fox,

and are now running from scent to view in the field adjoining the wood.

Will he reach his refuge? At any rate Tom, whose horse is quite beat, cannot influence his ultimate fate.

Barely ten yards from the wood Valiant seizes him, and he snaps back, but Gameboy joins issue with Valiant for the spoils, and the whole pack roll him over in the open.

"Whoo! whoop!" shouts Tom, running up on his feet, leaving his horse, with outstretched limbs and drooping head, panting and blowing in the middle of the field.

"Whoo! whoop!" shouts Billy, jumping off and blowing his horn.

Together they clear a space round the dead fox and carry out the final rights of the chase.

Diana's grief for the fox is to a great extent compensated by her extreme pleasure at the way her horse has carried her from start to finish.

The rest of the field begin to make their appearance, coming up from all directions. Their mounts all look very beat, as no one has had a chance of picking up a second horse all day. Men take out their watches; various calculations are made as to the time and distance. A fourteen-mile point, and something over twenty as hounds ran, in two hours and five minutes, is the final and considered opinion of the Duke. Those who have really seen nothing of the hunt put on another mile, perhaps two, and thus it grows in dimensions, like an angler's trout.

But most of the assembled sportsmen accept His Grace's calculation without dissent, as a mark of respect for his title. Sir Joseph, for instance, will tell her Ladyship that he and Tumbledown both agreed it must be a good fourteen-mile point. Mrs. Faucet will be told that he, Faucet, and the Duke worked it out,

and made it just over a fourteen-mile point. Little Devinia Bulkely will tell her mother that her precious old pet, the Duke, said it was a good fourteen-mile point, and he is always right, as he knows every yard of the country. While Ariadne Wigmore will impress the little doctor with the fact that the dear Duke, who had been piloting her—in fact they had ridden every inch of the hunt together—said it was a twenty-mile point.

Thus we see that although the Upper House may have been deprived of its former powers by jealous plebeian politicians, its members still continue largely to influence countryside opinion.

Of course there will be some contentious persons who will dispute His Grace's *pronunciamiento*, but not, of course, in his august presence. This outburst of independent opinion and free speech would be reserved till the port had circulated after dinner, when some bold spirit may assert:

"That old goat Tumbledown loves laying down the law. How could he possibly know how far hounds ran? He didn't even see as much of them as I did. He said they left Redpole Farm on the right—I don't believe they went anywhere near it."

When His Grace came in and told his wife that Billy had had a fourteen-mile point, she muttered something about President Wilson having done that long ago, and went on reading her novel.

In the meantime the field are congratulating Billy on the success of the day's hunt, praising the great performance of the dog hounds, and breaking into panegyrics of each other's, and especially their own, performances.

Billy insists on presenting the brush to Diana, complimenting her on having seen the hunt from start to finish and given them all a lead at the awkward places.

She replies that she can't accept any credit for it, as no one could help seeing a hunt on her horse.

Then she suddenly remembers Dick is not there, and instantly makes inquiries. Someone informs her that he staked his mare badly several fields back, and was last seen leading her to Millchester, which is five miles away.

"He said he was going to take her to Mr. Glanders, the vet.'s, and wanted Miss Gibson not to bother about him, as he would make his own way home."

This information was quite enough for Diana to make up her mind to ride home through Millchester. All the pleasure of the hunt seemed to have disappeared in her anxiety for Dick and Goldflake, and turning left-handed on the road, she rode off in search of her cousin.

. . . . . .

Our gallant fox, and there is no doubt he was the same dark-coloured fellow that we found in Green Leas, was a traveller. He had come over-night all the way from Ashford Grove, to pay court to the yellow vixen that old Will had seen this morning in covert. While Billy Lines and his hounds were unprofitably drawing the Priory Woods, our friend was sleeping peacefully in one of the straggling copses of Green Leas. It is possible he might have been caught napping if hounds had not opened in covert, proclaiming the presence of the object of his admiration, the sandy-coated vixen. He looks up with a start as the deep note of the dog hounds floats down on the breeze to his bed of dry oak leaves. He crouches there, listening with ears pricked, sniffing the air. For a minute there is silence again; he stretches himself and gazes contemptuously at a scared hare dashing frenziedly past him, actually in the direction she had heard the hounds. Again he catches sound of their note in covert, and impatiently scratches his ear with a hind

leg; evidently they are hunting some other quarry in the furthermost copse.

With a feeling of relief he considers the possibility of lying low till his foes may go away on another fox. Then he remembers there can be no other than the yellow vixen. As he looks out from his kennel, he sees her stealing across a glade with her ears laid back and an anxious look in her eyes. His natural instinct is to turn back and leave the wood while hounds are on her line. First remorse, then sympathy gets the better of

"Over the big grass field he goes."

him, and he quickly makes up his mind to cross her line and make for the hovel on the far side of the wood where he had entered it last night. He feels he is capable of giving his foes the slip, as he has done it before, and he may save his little friend, the yellow vixen.

At this moment, hearing a holloa in the direction she has gone, he creeps unseen across a glade into the copse beyond. The holloa on his left front and the cry of hounds on his right give him a very fair indication of his immediate danger, so he traverses this without

pausing and breaks away, as he believes, unseen, though he can hear the strident note of hounds in covert on his right, getting nearer and nearer.

Over the big grass field he goes with a thrill of pride, hoping that he may have puzzled his pursuers and enabled his companion as well as himself to have got a comfortable start.

Every fox is born into the world with a bad name, and every man's hand is turned against him. From time immemorial they have been credited with evil doings, even to the extent of despoiling vineyards and carrying fire and flame into the cornfields of the Philistines. So our friend is under no misapprehension as to the risk he has run in crossing the vixen's line, even though it may cause some temporary confusion to his foes.

As he scrambles through the fence on the far side of the field, he hears a clear, shrill holloa behind him.

"Oho!" he thinks, "they're after me all right. Well, they will find I'm no fool, and I take a lot of catching when I'm pressed."

Billy's horn and the cry of hounds, now outside the covert, confirm his views, and he crosses the field at a steady, holding pace, then scrambles over a bank with a wattle fence on top of it, and drops down the far side. He makes for the hill from which he had reconnoitred his route into Green Leas, where he pauses on the top to take his bearings. He should be more right-handed if he is to strike the river near the osier bed, and pointing his mask in that direction, he crawls under some rails and descends the hill. Yes, hounds are undoubtedly on his line, and it is a long journey back to his own country. To Ashford Grove is the best part of half a night's journey, but the earths in Gibbet Wood are on the way, and if he is pressed he can make use of that refuge.

"Perhaps this fallow field will not carry so keen a scent as the grass? It seldom does," he thinks to himself as he ambles across it.

He jumps over a ditch and on to a gap in the fence, squeezes through this, and makes his way down to the stream. He runs along the bank of the river till he gets to the snug, rush-girt pond, then threads his way through the brittle reeds, flushing a couple of wary teal, who are soon out of sight.

As he crosses an open watery patch he disturbs a foolish moorhen in the field, that starts running in his direction towards the pond, then, with clumsy effort, it rises from the ground in ungainly flight and disappears in the rushes.

Bearing round the edge of the pond, he plunges into the stream close to the reeds, as they will cover his passage of the river from the eyes of his pursuers. Only an expert eye could have realised what was swimming across the stream; two laid-back ears and a little pointed black muzzle alone were visible above the water.

He scrambles out on the far side wet and muddy, and shakes himself; then pauses for a second or two, and decides not to waste time going through the osier bed, but to hug the edge of it, as this will also hide his route, now pointing for Redpole Farm.

He makes his way across the meadows up to the farm, which he decides to leave on his right. It is perhaps a risk going so near the buildings, but it is in a direct line for his point, and as long as he keeps his eyes open for stray dogs and men, he is not likely to get into trouble, and the shortest way is the best way. Fortunately, there is no one in sight, only a few Buff Orpingtons that have strayed away from the farm, which take flight when they realise his presence in the same field.

Far more disconcerting are the cawing rooks over-

head and their shadows scattered around him on the grass; try how he will, he cannot get away from them.

He dives into a ditch in the corner of the field, runs close under the fence in the field beyond, then through a gap on to the plough. The green plover are feeding here, but their sentinel gives the warning cry, and they rise together with slow-flapping wings, so that their white under-plumage can now be seen against the blue sky.

He pauses to listen, and hearing no sound, his hopes are raised, only to be shattered as he again hears hounds down in the valley behind him, and, pushing on at a steady pace, he crosses the plough and creeps through a gap in the thickset fence into the seed field beyond, saying to himself. "Well, that plough won't help 'em, at any rate."

It is a steep climb up the next grass field, and though it is out of his way, he deliberately runs the sheep as he catches sight of them on the far side of the clump of ash trees. They in their turn charge down on him, and if he had not been both strong and active, might have bowled him over. As it is, they cross and recross his line, conforming to his ruse in a manner that gives him the utmost satisfaction.

It was with a feeling of relief that he topped the hill crossing the Wenby Road without misadventure. The villagers had settled down to their midday meal, or some prying eyes must have seen him as he now makes his way over the fields skirting the village.

Still full of running, he traverses the village allotments at the back of the "Green Dragon," where a dog that is tied to its kennel yaps, and tears at its chain, as it sees him pass.

Already some of the wet mud of the river on his coat is beginning to dry, and as he descends the hill with lolloping stride, he feels confident that he will shake off his enemies.

Before crossing the main road at the bottom of the hill he stops to listen and sniff the air, looking to right and left to pick up sound or smell before venturing across. The road is clear, and, even better still, there is no sound of hounds, who are now in the valley behind the hill.

As he stands there with ears pricked and muzzle scenting the wind, he hears the clock in the Wenby Church tower strike the half-hour, but elsewhere the whole countryside is silent. Perhaps, after all, he may make Ashford Grove at his leisure, but there is no use wasting time, he thinks, as he scrambles up a bank, running along the top for a couple of yards to avoid jumping into a furze bush.

An outlying rabbit, catching sight of him, bolts for its hole in the bank, and our friend gives a swish of his brush as he thinks of his dinner.

He makes good time over the next half-dozen small enclosures, as the numerous banks offer no difficulties to him, and almost before he realises it he drops into the Watcombe–Millchester road.

At the point where he has emerged on to the road he is faced with another problem; there is no immediate exit, as the fence beyond is quite impenetrable, and far from being a quiet country lane, this is a main artery between two important townships, along which no crafty fox would wisely run. However, in less than a second he has taken his bearings and remembers he should be to the right of the bend in the road, where there is a convenient gap at the foot of the drooping ash and a milestone on the opposite side of the road.

As he makes his way cautiously round the curve, he comes upon two men working on the road. They are just lighting their pipes preparatory to holding a political discussion until it is time to go home to tea. One throws a stone at him, but he has turned back and

rounded the corner almost before the stone leaves the man's hand. He can hear hounds away on his left, and their cry gets nearer, so, without further ado, he plunges through the thick hazel stems into the thirty-acre field beyond.

Gibbet Wood, on the near hill, is at last in sight, and he heads straight for it, though he wishes that the man who is standing in the field had not seen him.

With the pack still on his line, he decides that the earth in the centre of the wood is worth trying, and the thought braces him up to put his best leg forward over the next two fields.

On entering the wood he settled down to a steady trot, as it is a steep climb up to the earth, which runs deep under the bank, with its mouth partly hidden by the stunted oak.

He is zig-zagging through a thick patch of chestnut saplings when he sees, to his dismay, a man standing close to the earth, and the smell of burning wood reaches his nostrils. Suddenly his ears catch the sound of a grating saw moving to and fro in even, measured beats; it is the others cutting timber further up the hill. He pauses for a moment to take note of the dangers ahead, and as he stands listening, with a pad in the air, a little red squirrel darts past him and plays hide-and-seek as it climbs the lichen-covered stem of a tall beech tree.

Once again on the move, he swerves right-handed, and decides that, come what may, he must make Ashford Grove, and the sooner the better.

He emerges out on the plough beyond the wood and trots up a furrow, where some frightened partridges, running in front of him, take to wing.

Two boys in the next field head him, and he swings left-handed, turning down the hill on the far side of the two oaks standing in solitary grandeur in the middle of twenty acres of grass.

Over the plough his feet were lagging, and his brush, heavy with mud, was drooping, but as he lopes down the steep grass slope beyond he feels fresher again.

Slipping unseen across the railway, he crosses Rickborough Dell, but the big pastures and stout fences beyond begin to tell on him. His tongue feels swollen, and the screaming boys and the cry of hounds on the hill behind him pierce his brain; but though his heart beats fast, his pads cannot move any faster.

He struggles gallantly on through Rickborough Park down to the bottom end of the lake, where the spring rises, scarcely noticing the wild duck who, thrashing the water with outspread wings, climb higher and higher as they circle round him, and then disappear in arrow-head flight, shaping their course down the little stream that trickles out at the far end.

Crouching, he squeezes through a drain out in the old stone wall, and is once more out in the open. Though he knows every blade of grass, every inch of ground, yet never before has it seemed so far from the lake to his home. His back feels cramped, as he painfully drags one worn-out leg after the other across the park and through the spinney, where often before he has snatched a rabbit; thence he slides down the ditch and almost tumbles headlong on the road.

Plodding on across the fields he skirts Rickborough village, crawls under a gate which he would have avoided if he could have trusted his limbs to carry him through the fence.

Hounds are gaining on him now, and every minute their cry gets nearer and nearer. He can even hear the thud of galloping hoofs cutting into the green turf.

There is a big ditch on this side of the next fence, but it is the last, and then, if he can only get across the field

beyond, he will reach his refuge, the welcome earth at the bottom of the wood.

He makes a gallant effort to scramble up the side of the ditch, but he is so weak and faint he has no longer control of his limbs, and he falls back gasping.

The leading hounds are almost across the field, and he nerves himself for a last supreme effort. Has he the nervous energy to call on now? He crouches at the bottom of the ditch, with hanging tongue and ears laid back. Surely he can't be really beat? A frantic spring and a scramble, and he is up the side of the wet ditch, and though his feet slip from under him, he manages to squeeze through the fence as the leading hounds race up to where he had lain.

He is so exhausted and dazed with his effort that he cannot now see the wood ahead of him, but instinct tells him to keep on the straight course he has made all day. He can no longer call on his aching limbs to go any faster, but notwithstanding the deadening pains in his cramped muscles, he manages to drag his weary body across the field.

There is no longer a white tag to his brush, which now, wet and bedraggled, trails on the grass. If only he can creep into the wood he can still save himself. There is something ahead—a blurred vision of tall trees! Can it be shelter and safety? Hoping against hope, he gallantly struggles on. At last he can just make out the edge of the wood only ten yards in front of him—but it is too late! He sinks, and turns his head round, snarling, his teeth bared with one last snap in defence of his life, as first Valiant, then Gameboy seize him, and his stout heart beats no more.

He dies true to the honourable tradition of his race, without a murmur; a gallant fox.

Ever since he had first come into the world, a little fluffy red cub with closed eyes, he has been the pride of

his mother, the first and foremost, the biggest and boldest of the litter.

His brothers and sisters, playing in the sun, used to chase him round the clumps of hazel, but try how they would they could never catch him by the white tag to his brush.

By his strength and cunning he had outlived the others, and when his turn came, he died more valiantly than them all.

Let us hope that the little yellow vixen at Green Leas may mother such another! . . .

CHAPTER XVII

A LONG HACK HOME

We left Diana hacking home via Millchester, very pensive and anxious about her cousin and his horse.

Poor darling Dick! It would indeed be too sad if his favourite was seriously injured! She could not believe it was possible—it seemed only a few minutes since she had seen them both so vigorous and full of life, flying the fences and striding over the grass as though nothing was too much for them. She felt so proud of Dick being her cousin—only second cousin, of course, but still, he belonged to her in a way. That feeling of possession was distinctly pleasant! In fact, now she came to think of it, she really thought she was more fond of him than anyone else. What an extraordinary thing! She had never quite realised this before. Now she knew it was true, and the fact that Dick would be genuinely unhappy about poor Goldflake really pained her. Her one desire was to comfort him and be able to sympathise with him. She could not bear the thought of him being sad; she felt she would like to put her arm round him and have his head on her shoulder as she did on the day that he got concussion. Then she was not sure that he would really appreciate it, which rather depressed her. On the other hand, it was very hard to tell, because he was so undemonstrative, a rather manly sort of person, but that was, perhaps, his chief attraction, which especially appealed to her, and one of the reasons why she was so

fond of him. She was now quite distressed at the thought that she had hurt his feelings about Mathilde, but she didn't want him to think that she didn't care, and yet she didn't want him to think that she minded a tiny bit! Then, when he kissed her hands after dinner that night, she was so pleased and happy, although she tried hard not to show her delight. Poor Diana! The more she tried to analyse her feelings, the more complex and difficult it became! She put it down to being tired after a long and exciting hunt. It is more probable that she was perhaps almost in love—just pleasantly near the precipice, though quite confident of not falling over. All she knew was that her poor little heart ached terribly, and in a way that it never had before. She wondered whether Dick in his misfortune had thought of her, or wanted her sympathy. She hoped he had, and she longed to be able to comfort him and tell him she wanted to share his grief. If only she could? Naturally, she would not admit she was even the tiniest bit in love! Woman-like, she could not understand herself any more than she wished to be understood—except by the right person, of course, and that should not be too easy a problem for him. To be read like a book! The very suggestion rankled—it sounded so insipid and character-less. Far better "A woman's love be writ in water, a woman's faith be traced in sand." She would never reveal her innermost feelings to a soul, and yet, if she made up her mind not to do so, she knew, only too well, it would be the one thing she would long to do, one day. She was puzzling this out and getting even more bewildered in her efforts to do so, when she saw a man leading a horse in the distance.

Evidently the poor animal was in pain and moved with difficulty.

Before she could be sure that it was Dick, her heart,

anticipating the fact, beat faster and faster. She pressed Crusader, who, fortunately, was far from being tired, into a canter, and very soon overtook the unhappy pair.

"Oh, Dickyboy, what's happened?" she cried. "Poor darling, I am so sorry—she seems to be in such awful pain."

Dick turned round, and from his expression it was quite clear he was almost in tears.

"Isn't it damnable?" he said despondently. "And all my fault, too. I shall never forgive myself! She was going so perfectly, and I put her at some rails. I think there was a drain cut on the near side, and she put her foot in it and came down on the fence. One of the upright posts must have staked her between the hind-legs—and now, as you see she can hardly move!"

"Oh, Dick, I *am* sorry! I do hope it's not as bad as it seems!"

Dick looked lachrymosely at his limping favourite. "It's the last time she'll hunt this season, Di—if," he added, with a suspicious huskiness in his voice, "she ever hunts again. And I was putting her into training for the spring racing after to-day, too!"

Poor Dick was heart-broken, and quite unfairly blamed himself. The bitter disappointment at not being able to run his mare, when he had set his heart on winning this race, was bad enough, but even worse was the feeling that he might lose a tried friend, who had carried him so gallantly! Perhaps this was the last ride he would ever have on her. He felt a lump in his throat as he patted her neck.

They walked on a few yards in sorrowful silence, and Dick went on self-reproachfully, "She was simply perfect to-day—twice the mare she was last year. It was all my fault for not looking properly where we were going." And then, as if a little ashamed of this

unwonted display of emotion, he tried to smile up at his cousin. "Crusader went grand, Di; I'm awfully glad it wasn't him."

Diana's eyes had filled with tears, she was so sorry for Dick in this trouble, and longed to think of some way to help him.

"Look here, Dickyboy," she said sympathetically, "I'll trot on and warn Glanders to have everything ready, and I'll telephone for the car to come and fetch you, and Wilkins can bring out rugs for her in case they are short in Glanders' stable."

Dick gulped unaccountably, "You are a brick, Di! Fancy a girl thinking of that—you ought to be Chief of the Imperial General Staff!"

"Well, cheer up, Dick! It mayn't be so bad, after all." And she started off at a trot for Millchester, a mile or so up the road.

Fortunately Mr. Glanders is at home, and listens to Diana's instructions for the reception of Goldflake, then orders some oatmeal gruel for Crusader while his owner telephones for the car.

She also tells Stubbs to send a light saddle with Wilkins, so that he can pick up her horse on his return and hack him home. She will be riding back by Wenby and Upwey, where there is a bridge over the river. Also he must send coats for Mr. Dick and herself.

Five minutes later Dick arrives with his mare, and after careful inspection Glanders reports that the case is undoubtedly serious. She may pull through, but it all depends on the mare herself. If she is an animal with a great heart she will come out all right, but it will be difficult to get her to feed for some days, and if he can get her to take a little milk it is as much as he can hope for. Probably he will have to put her in slings later on.

"She's a lovely mare too, Mr. Phennell," he observes.

"Yes, and she's as good as she looks, Glanders! I had great hopes of winning the big hunters' race at Bickhampton next month with her."

"Well, I'm afraid that is quite out of the question; but we'll try and pull her through if you'll leave her here, sir."

"Oh, I do hope you can, Mr. Glanders!" says Diana. "I've sent home for her own rugs to be brought out, and the man can stay and look after her, if you want any extra help."

"Oh, no! He needn't do that," the vet. assures her, as he starts on the preliminary care of his patient. "I'll see to her myself. I've never seen a kinder mare—we'll be friends in no time, you may depend upon it, and I'll do all I can for her."

Feeling that, now Goldflake is in the skilful hands of a very excellent and genuinely horse-loving vet., there is nothing more she can do for the present, Diana tells her cousin she is going to hack on by Wenby and Upwey.

"I've told Wilkins to bring a saddle," she explains to him, "so you can pick me up on the way." She lays a sympathetic little hand on his arm. "Come and put me up, Dickyboy." As she jumped up lightly from his hands on to Crusader, and he arranges the elastic under her neat, mud-splashed boot, Dick was conscious of unaccustomed emotions. No one but Diana would have quite understood that grief of his, and there was a marvellous comfort in her sympathy. He somehow hated the idea of her leaving him. He, a grown-up man, who had roughed it in many places in peace and war, now had an infantile longing to lay his head for comfort on her slim little shoulder.

"No, don't fret, Dickyboy," she whispered, gently tapping his bashed-in hat with her whip, "Goldflake is in splendid hands."

Dick patted the small foot under which he had adjusted the elastic in inarticulate gratitude. His utterance was almost choked. "Rather not, Di—I'll pick you up as soon as I possibly can."

With a parting wave she walks her horse out of the yard and starts on her long hack home. Before she reaches Wenby it is dark, and what is worse, a fog is coming on. Occasionally the horse's shoes strike a stone and sparks flash on the dark surface of the road.

Passing through the dimly-lit village street, she meets the car, and is thankful to know that it will soon pick up Dick, who is only worrying himself now by remaining at Glanders'.

On the far side of Wenby the fog gets thicker, and with the night setting in, she cannot see a yard in front of her. It is quite impossible to go faster than a very slow walk, and as it is, Crusader is groping his way in the dark, with each foot in turn. She feels very depressed and very tired.

Suddenly, at a bend in the road which neither she nor her horse can see, he seems to slip down suddenly on his knees. At first she thinks he has fallen down. Crusader stands motionless, then she realises that he has got his forelegs into a ditch. She hardly knows what to do as he slides slowly into the bottom of it. He now appears to be level on his legs, and turning round a couple of times, he very carefully crawls out again. At first she is not certain whether he has scrambled out on to the road or into a field, but as he walks on slowly, Diana is relieved to find that they are on the hard road again. Unfortunately, in the pitch darkness she is not by any means sure whether she went into the right- or the left-hand ditch, and under these circumstances she is uncertain in which direction she is now moving at a snail's pace along the road.

Poor Diana has visions of being out all night, and

gives a shudder as the chill, damp air penetrates to the bones of her body. All she can do under the circumstances is to trust to Crusader's instinct, and even a normally intelligent horse may go wrong in a fog.

Then she hears someone walking with a stick, which he is using like a blind man, tapping the edge of the footpath to make sure of his way. She can still see nothing, but the tapping gets nearer and nearer. The uncanny noise coming out of the pitch darkness unnerves her, and she feels her poor heart thumping loudly in response.

"Can you tell me if this is the right way to Upwey?" she asks the stranger, hoping he may be some respectable person who can help her out of her difficulties.

"That I can, Miss! You be right, but I doubt you gettin' there to-night! The fog be turrible thick."

"Thank you so much! I must get there somehow—I've got to get back to Rushworth to-night."

"Oh, you be Miss Gibson, then! 'Ow's Spider, Miss?"

Diana's spirits rise. "It's you, Bindle, is it? Dear old Spider! he's awfully well and happy. Tell me, Bindle, how far am I from Upwey?"

"A matter of two 'n arf to three mile, Miss. If you'll allow me, I'll lead your horse back to Upwey. I know every twist in the road—it don't make no matter to me if it be dark or day."

With that Bindle catches hold of Crusader's bridle and leads him on, continuing the investigations with his stick along the edge of the footpath to guide his steps. Between the taps he carries on a somewhat disjointed conversation.

"Hounds must have come a long way. Ar hurd they be meeting at the Priory, and saw 'em runnin' be Wenby pastures into Gibbet Wood," he remarks.

"Yes, it was a wonderful hunt, and they killed below

Ashford Grove," Diana tells him, adding, " Mr. Phennell hurt his horse badly."

" Aye, but Ar'm sorry fur that! Ar seed 'im on a nice chestnut."

" Yes, isn't she a lovely mare? It's terrible bad luck!"

After a pause Bindle asks, " You don't know anyone who'd fancy a nice tarrier, do 'e, Miss?"

" Don't think I do," says Diana, falling into the trap. " What sort is it, Bindle?"

" Lor', Miss, someone sich as you, what knows a good dawg, oughter see my Sal. She's a little beauty! Sharp as lightnin', clever as a magpie! Proper-bred Seelium, too! Ar shouldn't never part wi' 'er, but trade be that bad, yer know, and it's hard to feed a well-bred bitch wot's always been used to sharing supper wi' you. And Ar'm too proud a man to tak' the dole," explains Bindle, full of dignity, though it would be difficult to know to what he might be alluding as " trade."

The pathetic case of Sal evidently touches Diana's kind heart.

" I suppose you don't want to sell her, Bindle?"

" Noa, Ar doesn't want to sell her; but, as the saying is, ' love jumps out of yon wind'r when poverty coomes in be the doar.' Ar reckon she's cost me close on four puns one way and 'nother."

He had really exchanged her for a dozen home-made rabbit nets when she was a pup.

" What will you take for her?"

" Well, Ar s'pose if sommun were to offer me a fiver, Ar should have to part wi' 'er, though it would come nigh breaking my 'eart. You see, Ar doan't really want to sell 'er, but it's onsatisfactory to loan a well-bred betch like 'er; they be bound to get in trouble. A man couldn't be more anxious aboot his darter. Ar

loaned Spider's old mother one time, and she coom back as proud as Punch wi' a family o' seven, and you'd hardly believe the difficulty Ar had to sell them pups as French poodles! Ar had 'em shaved and all, but you 'ad to keep clippin' 'em so regular, or they'd lose the French charicter, so to speak."

"Well, I'll give you five pounds, Bindle, and you'll know that she'll have a good home."

"Well, Miss, there be no one else Ar'd part her to, but Ar'd be proud if you took 'er, and she'd be nice coompany for Spider. She's as clean as a queen in th' 'ouse."

So the deal is settled then and there, without further introduction to Sal.

During all this time the conditions were not improving, and the journey to Upwey seemed endless, in spite of Bindle's enlightening conversation.

He was full of news about the goings on in the country. How Sir Joseph was out for the first time since his friend shot him. How his Grace was shooting up at Welkham in Norfolk at that time, and they got a record bag for that time of year—not that he could remember the 'xact figure. Mrs. Carmichael has again let her shoot to the same syndicate, even though they don't find the game they should have there. He heard Miss Snowball be going to marry the new gentleman officer wot's now adjutant at the depot—the same wot Mr. Hackett sold his bay four-year-old to. Had Miss Gibson heard that the new parson up at Wenby was a-goin' to hunt? Got a kerridge and horse and pony and all. He knowd, 'cos his coosen was gard'ner there, and pleased as Punch 'cos he got the manoor for the garden. Yer see, Parson Cawley, 'oo was there afore 'im, only kept but a coople o' bicycles. They do say as Sir William Wortlebury's lost a mint of money in cotton, but in course 'e's never been the same man since

he lost that sow what won championship at the Royal Show, and so on.

In the meantime, Diana has come to a decision. She has made up her mind to enter Crusader in the race that Goldflake was intended to run in, and Dick shall ride him. It will please him, and she is so sure of her horse now that she feels certain that it will not upset him. He really rides just like a polo pony, and never loses his head. Besides, it would be rather fun, and except for to-day, he has had a nice easy season. But the most important consideration is, that it will please her precious Dick.

She was turning this over in her mind, when she heard the faint noise of a motor car behind her, but as yet could see nothing. Then two dim lights can be discerned, and very slowly these come nearer.

She tells Bindle to try and stop the car, which he does with some difficulty, as the occupants can only see a couple of yards in front of them, owing to the thick clouds of mist lit up in the beam of the head-lights.

To her delight it is Dick, and they decide that Wilkins shall ride Crusader and follow close in rear of the car. They bid good-night, with many thanks, to Bindle, who accepts a generous tip, though courteously asserting that the pleasure has been his own, and promising to bring Sal over to Rushworth before the end of the week.

Owing to the denseness of the fog they are unable to go faster than five miles an hour, which is a fair average speed for Crusader and Wilkins, who are guided by the tail lamp of the car.

"I'm freezing!" says Diana. "Feel how cold my fingers are."

Dick did not hesitate to feel.

"I've been awfully anxious about you, my poor little Di, in this beastly fog," he told her, carefully

tucking the rug around her and setting to work to chafe her icy hands between his. And as the car crawled on, and warmth returned to her extremities, and a greater and mysterious and wonderful warmth of companionship encompassed them, Diana broached the great scheme which had recently occurred to her.

"I say, Dickyboy, I'm going to enter Crusader for the Bickhampton Cup. Will you ride him?"

Dick sat bolt upright in the shadowy limousine. He was still holding Diana's hands, presumably from a sense of duty, as they were now quite warm. Many times in the past he had suggested to his cousin that Crusader would do great things over the sticks, and always she had emphatically declared that nothing on earth would induce her to spoil so perfect a hunter. And now, Dick understood clearly enough—she wanted to risk it, just to console him for his own disappointment over Goldflake. By gad! he swore to himself, what a splendid friend for a fellow! A big lump came into his throat.

"You're *not* going to run Crusader," he said decisively.

"But—but, Dickyboy," she argued, "you've always said yourself that there's no risk of spoiling him now."

"I have said so, and I do think so," Dick admitted, "but, anyway, you're not going to run him."

"I am."

"You're not."

"I am."

"I shan't ride him, then."

"All right, I'll get Hugo."

They both burst out laughing; and since Diana had unalterably made up her resolute little mind, and since Dick in his heart knew perfectly well that a hunter so sensible and so kind as Crusader would take no harm from a little racing, Diana, needless to say, won her point.

"Oh, Dick!" she laughed gleefully, when Dick's opposition had at last been overcome, "it will be exciting—training him, and all that!"

Somehow, in the excitement of it, Dick's arm, before he was aware of it, had found its way round her waist.

"Rather!" he agreed. "And we'll do our d——dest to pull off the Bickhampton Cup."

And very soon his own sorrows were temporarily forgotten in the zest of discussing plans for the great campaign ahead. Dick eagerly appreciated the situation. Luckily Crusader had had, on the whole, an easy season. He was as fit as a fiddle, fresh as a daisy, and full of himself. He wouldn't need a lot of fast work; a couple of sharp schools a week to put his jumping right, and plenty of long, slow work to keep him feeding. He was a clean-winded horse, and the great thing, Dick thought, was to get him into fast work gradually, and to keep him eating all he could at the same time.

"We've got a full five weeks, Di," he rattled on, "and we'll want it all, as racing fit is very different from hunting fit. But"—that errant arm, as though responsive to its owner's enthusiasm, increased its pressure round the slim waist, and unconsciously she snuggled up a little closer to him—"but I'll lay my shirt we'll find that Crusader's something quite extra special."

Warm-hearted little Diana was overjoyed at the success of her scheme, and despite the fog without and the day's disaster, the interior of the car had become, so it seemed to her, a wonderfully pleasant place.

"Dickyboy, *isn't* it thrilling!" she murmured, gently leaning up against his shoulder. "And oh, another thing! I've just got you a little 'tarrier' from old Bindle."

"Di, you really are a dar—— Oh, dash it, here we are home!"

If the car had not at that moment turned in at the lodge of Rushworth there is no saying what precisely would have happened next; but as Dick helped his cousin out on to the broad flight of steps which led up to the Vanbrugh portals, he had perforce to content himself with pressing a now quite warm little hand to his lips in the approved continental manner.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE JOYS OF ANTICIPATION

With the approach of summer, rural life is early astir. The blushing dawn first summons the barn-door cocks, who, untucking their heads from underneath their wings, open one eye at a time, and rising from their perches, each, like a sentinel passing the call "All's well," heralds the orb of day. Later, as one rides out on a fresh spring morning when the whole countryside is green and glorious, with the sun awakening Nature and radiating its warmth through the chill air, who can but help feeling grateful for being alive? The blue smoke is curling up from the cottage chimneys, producing an atmosphere of home-like comfort within and a general air of peace and contentment without. The baby rabbits, emboldened by the ignorance of youth, play incautiously round the mouth of the family burrow. Partridges, now paired off, no longer heed the tread of hobnailed boots; cock pheasants strut about with a devil-may-care recklessness, knowing full well that a seven months' armistice is granted before war is renewed. The smaller birds are composing their love-songs, preparatory to the busy period of nest-building; yellow-hammers and the many families of finches throng the bushes and hedges, only a few weeks ago so black and now turning green with young foliage.

When we are up early, we feel at peace with ourselves and the world, and frankly pity the lie-abeds in town,

who have danced and supped the night through, only to be roused from their slumber with heavy heads and weary eyes. How much they miss in life! The charm of the country awakening when the blue haze lifts, and the sun, rising over the distant hills, with warm caress bestirring the green fields to smile once more, while, in the sky above, the zealous little larks trill their early matins. The man who is fortunate enough to see, hear and appreciate the existence of these, knows much of the mystery and the joy of life. Add to this the physical delight of a gallop on a thoroughbred horse over the sound turf, and the companionship of such an attractive little person as Diana, and we can but come to the same conclusion as Hugo—that Dick was a d——d lucky fellow. Dick was beginning to realise this more and more himself. On some mornings, after the mist had been dispelled by the sunshine, there would still remain little glistening atoms of moisture on the hedgerows, and as he gazed at his pretty cousin, with her curly eyelashes wet from the moist air, it always reminded him of rose-petals bedecked with rain-drops after a summer shower. It was very unlike him to get such romantic ideas in his head, but he could never suppress them, even had he wished to.

Crusader and Dick's other two horses had now been in training for more than a month, and were giving complete satisfaction to their owners and trainer. Morning work on the gallops is a most exhilarating tonic, and no one enjoyed it more than Diana.

The Rushworth string being limited to three horses, had this advantage, namely, that, as there was no second lot to come out, they could leave their stables three hours after their early morning feed, do their work with the sun on their backs, and return and be done down in comfortable time for their midday meal.

Horses thrive in the sunshine; given that and soft

water to drink, their coats will soon look healthy and sleek.

On this particular morning they were to do fast work over fences, and were not due to leave the stables till 9 a.m.

Hugo had come over to Rushworth for breakfast, as he was going to ride Little Nipper for Dick.

"Bad luck you couldn't run Crusader the other day!" he observed, referring to a meeting which had been stopped by fog, where Crusader had been entered in a big handicap chase to get experience.

"Yes," admitted Dick, "it's a bore, because he'd have learnt something, and we'd have learnt something about him; but it can't be helped."

"Quite—I'd like to have had a bit on him next time out if we really had anything to go by," remarked Hugo, walking back from the sideboard, where he had helped himself to a liberal portion of savoury omelette.

Dick picked up a new *Racing Calendar* from his pile of letters.

"By Jove, there's some pretty useful entries for the Bickhampton Cup!" he announced, running his eye down the formidable list, while Diana, who had finished her breakfast, studied it over his shoulder.

"I'm wild with excitement now we are getting near the race," she declared. "Last night I dreamt that he'd won, only Dick got disqualified for jumping into the paddock over the rails instead of coming in by the gate. I hope you won't really do it, Dick."

"No," he assured her with a grin, "once I'm over the last fence I won't take any gratuitous risks in that way. I hear," continued he, "old Potts is very enthusiastic about Chassepot's chances, and thinks he'll beat Crusader because we kept him here instead of sending him to a trainer."

Hugo corroborated this hearsay evidence.

" That's right, Dick. I saw 'Airy yesterday, and he told me all about it. They sent the horse to old Tom Curlieu. He's a rum old boy, and there's not much he doesn't know. But now he's got the gout so badly he leaves almost everything to Judy Curlieu, his daughter; everything except the swearing—he's made a corner in that. I think his chief trouble is that he trains for such awful scoundrels, and he has a job to get some of them to pay their training bills. He says old Potts 's a capital chap—which means, I suppose," laughed Hugo, " that he pays regularly."

Old Tom Curlieu had been a bit of a lad in his youth, now many summers past, when the swells of the days were accustomed to wear tight check trousers and bowler hats in the country. He was of a good old Cornish family, having for many years owned large estates in that county, which he had since mortgaged up to the hilt. In the old photograph albums at Batford, where he now lived, can be seen many portraits of the young Curlieu of the day. Sometimes he is gracing a group at a shooting-party in an elegant deer-stalking cap; elsewhere he is seated at the helm of a smart dog-cart and pair of ponies, off for a picnic, with the ladies of the party in bustled skirts and tight-fitting bodices, enhancing their well-proportioned busts. On the next page we find him with the late Mrs. Tom on horseback at the meet of the hounds. She is mounted on a bang-tailed, long-maned hunter of those times, and wearing a top hat over her forehead, a tight-fitting coat and sweeping habit. Here he is again, starting from the hall door for the races; this time on the box of a coach, with a well-turned-out, level team of greys. Tom has on a grey billycock hat to match, and is enveloped in a fawn-coloured box-cloth coat, with colossal mother-of-pearl buttons running parallel down his front. In the next picture the photographer

has posed Mr. Curlieu with a background representing the Alps. He is in his frock-coat and tall hat, and holding in his hand a pair of new kid gloves. The massive trees recently felled in the immediate background give the impression that the artist was fortunate to have caught him during a short pause for rest from his Herculean labours. Apart from this, each picture bears evidence of a life of leisure in all its phases.

Poor old Tom now found himself shackled financially by the indiscretions of his youth and physically by acute attacks of the gout.

Young Curlieu, his son, was born with a mechanical mind, and he and his father never understood each other, nor tried to. The old man would say regretfully and without any justification, that he threw back to something wrong, but, thank Heaven, Judy was all right!

But to revert to our breakfast at Rushworth.

Diana asks if Mr. Hiels was going to ride Chassepot.

"Rather!" Hugo informs them. "'Airy's in training now, and goes down there regularly to ride gallops. You know he's an awful ruffian, but quite a good sportsman in his own way. I don't imagine old Potts is giving him much for riding, and I don't suppose he really wants it, though there probably isn't any regular income attached to 'Airy's finances. I wouldn't trust him with my change, personally."

"I suppose he's still pretty useful, isn't he, Hugo?" queried Dick, looking up from the *Calendar*.

Hugo thought he was—very useful.

"I bet it's pretty hard to get the inside of 'Airy round the bends," he chuckled. "When he first went down there to ride a school he used to binge himself up, but Judy knocked that on the head, I'm told. On one particular occasion he emptied Curlieu's decanter of whisky, and Judy, realising the situation, put 'Airy up on an old black selling plater, who could barely get

two miles and skated through his fences, though he never would fall. 'Airy never realised it, and doesn't know to this day that he wasn't up on Chassepot. Hugo banged one fist into the palm of his other hand to emphasise his point, and continued, "Two days later a letter came from Sir Joseph saying that his friend was far from pleased with the horse's jumping, which appeared to have been most unsatisfactory. Judy wrote back to say they hadn't got a better jumper in the stable, and would he bring his friend down next time and see them do a school himself? On this occasion all the drink was locked up, and 'Airy was going about like a rat that had been poisoned and was dying of thirst. Judy said the doctor had ordered her father to drink nothing but barley-water, and there was nothing else in the house. Eventually, when they got 'Airy up, the horse did a rare school, to the delight of Sir Joseph. I believe 'Airy had five minutes in private with Judy, and he's never dared ask for anything there since. She very nearly made him take the pledge."

"What a splendid person she must be!" exclaimed Diana enthusiastically.

"Yes, she ought to marry before she turns into an old man—I don't think she'd ever become an old maid," observes Hugo in all seriousness, being an acknowledged authority on all sex problems. "After all, I know quite a lot of fellows who began life as boys and gradually developed into old women. I always say there are miracles going on round us every day, if only we kept our eyes open."

Dick shied the *Calendar* at his head.

"Lord, what rot you talk, Hugo!" he laughed. "By the by, that's a good horse of Bullock's—but he'll have to carry a ten-pound penalty. I wonder who'll ride him?"

Hugo's knowledge of such matters was inexhaustible.

"Oh, he's sure to get Lumley!—you know the little man? He's ridden a lot of winners this season. He had a high old row with our friend, Mr. Ramp, who pulled across his heels and then objected to Lumley for crossing. I wonder Mr. Ramp hasn't been warned off ages ago. 'Gentleman rider' is a dire misnomer in his case."

"Is he that little creature with a pock-marked face, pig's eyes and a huge nose?" asked Diana.

Hugo laughed. "That describes him exactly."

"Sharpe will ride Dumpling, I suppose," inquired Dick, "and Willy Black will ride that horse he trains, Harlequin. I like Willy—he's as brave as a lion, and as straight as they make 'em." He glanced at the clock and rose abruptly from the table, while Hugo gulped down the remainder of his coffee. "Good Lord! it's getting late. We must get a move on. Come on, Diana," he exhorted, holding the door open for her.

When they arrive at the stables, Dick has each horse run out, a wise precaution when one is lucky enough to have sound animals to train.

Very few horses in training trot out any too freely towards the end of the season, and it is hardly to be expected in a dry summer. But with horses like these, that are true and sound in their action, it is of vital importance instantly to note the first indications of lameness.

They each pass the test satisfactorily, and Stubbs reports that they all ate up first thing this morning.

They are three very nice horses, but even under cover of his rugs Crusader puts the other two in the shade, and his little owner beams with pride and delight as Dick jumps up on him. She still rides him herself on days when he is only doing trotting and walking—a very sound plan, as she thus keeps in touch with her

horse and he realises when in a double bridle and side-saddle he is expected to be a perfect hack and not a 'chaser.

A horse very readily learns certain habits, sometimes bad ones, but equally often correspondingly good ones. Crusader's charming owner realised that, as long as she rode her horse pretty regularly herself, she could instantly check any tiresome habit before it developed and took root.

Hugo is now up on Little Nipper, and Wilkins, who rides a very good school, having been apprenticed to the job in early life, is on York, the point-to-pointer.

Diana is riding Multum in Parvo, a rare stamp of hack hunter, and they all walk up to the gallops, where the fences have now been put in apple-pie order under Dick's and Will's supervision.

The orders are, two and a half miles over fences half speed, stripped gallop. After the last fence Dick intends to let Crusader go away from the other two if he can do so without being pressed. He puts one on each side of Crusader so as to accustom him to horses taking off a bit in front or behind him, and thus learn to concentrate on his own job and meet his fences right.

Diana canters over to the rising ground where she can get a good view of the proceedings. Her blue eyes are sparkling with delight as she watches the three horses spin up the two-furlong slope to where they are going to start. Now they are drawn up in line, and a few seconds later they are off.

Hugo's horse, evidently taking a bit of a hold, is setting the pace. Swish over the first fence they go, with Little Nipper increasing his lead, but his rider has got hold of him now, and the other two are coming up level. The point-to-pointer is really going about his best pace, and although he cannot pull out any more speed, he can keep it up indefinitely. The next fence

they jump level, and as they turn the bend they come to the first open ditch. In an incredibly short time they are over this, their hind quarters and the steel glint of their hind shoes disappearing on the far side.

Along the straight there are two plain fences fairly close together, and it looks as if Crusader is jumping away from the others now, and yet he appears to be only taking enough hold to make him a pleasant ride. Now they are putting on the pace, coming down the hill to the water, which is really a wide ditch filled up with gorse prickles. Over they go, and again he jumps away from his companions, though possibly Hugo's sharp little horse may have got away from the fence quicker than the other two. Turning again, they can now be seen broadside-on, stretched low to the ground and racing at the next open ditch. The thud of hoofs drumming on the sound turf can just be heard where Diana is standing. Multum in Parvo, with ears pricked, is all attention, and his rider's cheeks are flushed with excitement as she observes the ease with which her horse outstrides the other two. Dick pushes Crusader, and he appears to shoot from the others, taking off so far from the guard rail of the ditch that it looks as if he cannot get over, but he lands yards out on the far side when his rider steadies him quietly to let Hugo and Wilkins come up to him again. Over the next three fences they are almost level, but Little Nipper, jumping crooked at the last, collides with Crusader. "Keep him straight, blast you!" shouts Dick to the unfortunate Hugo, who is cannoned from one horse on to the other. The pace is too much for the point-to-pointer, and Hugo and Dick draw away from him. When they have gone about two and a quarter miles, Little Nipper hits a fence pretty hard, and his rider again gets well cursed by Dick for nearly falling off. But the horse has really had enough, and Dick, shouting

"They can now be seen broadside-on, stretched low to the ground."

to Hugo to ease up, lets his own horse sail on, just urging him enough to see if he answers. Crusader, who has not even been stretched, instantly responds, giving his rider the satisfactory feeling of having a nice bit of speed up his sleeve to call on when required.

He jumps the last fence alone, but as boldly as if he were prepared to go round again. Then Dick pulls him up gradually, jumps off, and stands up to him to listen and see if he is blowing.

In a remarkably few seconds he has blown himself clear with that short, deep breath and a flutter of his nostrils—sure indications as to his fitness in wind. When Diana canters up, though the veins stand out on his shining coat, except for sweat marks on his neck and shoulder he shows no signs of his gallop.

"He went jolly well, and I'm awfully pleased with his jumping," Dick tells her approvingly.

"So am I—I think he improves every school he has," she replies. "But, Dick, I think you were brutal to poor Mr. Ellis—I could hear you from where I was standing, poor little man!"

"Oh, he's all right, aren't you, you little blighter?" says Dick cheerily, turning to his jockey, who now appears leading his horse, and responds with a cheery grin.

"Oh, I suppose Little Nipper thought he was going to be asked to go three miles, and he knew two was his distance, so he thought he'd better remind me of the fact!"

If we do not follow our friends back to the stables we have just time to catch a glimpse of events in another quarter.

Sir Joseph and 'Airy had motored over to Batford, where the former now had a second horse in training. 'Airy had insisted on his having another, assuring him that he would never get a satisfactory trial with any of

the horses in Curlieu's charge unless it was his own. Consequently Mr. Hiels had arranged a somewhat complicated deal with a friend of his, resulting in the purchase of a fairly useful old handicap horse.

The late owner was a dissipated, pasty-faced, seedy-looking young man, who had quickly run through all his money racing, and consequently had to realise his last effects to obtain some ready cash. He now looked like having to live by his wits, and as birds of a feather flock together, he and 'Airy naturally ran into one another, and finding each had views in common on life, they soon became pretty intimate.

A week ago 'Airy had run across him in London at a mutual and somewhat disreputable club, and on learning that he was short of funds and generally in pretty low water, he was only too pleased to give him a helping hand, provided he got something out of it himself.

"Well, 'Orace, how goes it?" he exclaimed, greeting his friend at the cocktail bar, and laying a sympathetic hand on his shoulder.

"Not too dandy, old boy," drawled Horace Hopeful. "Very short of ready, and had no luck for months. Cashed all my horses except old Lucifer."

"Humph! Sorry to hear it, old chap—I know the feeling myself only too well." 'Airy compressed his rubber lips and nodded his head lugubriously.

"Don't know anyone who'd buy old Lucifer, do you? He's a bit high in the handicap, but if anyone's ready to pay a summer's keep and work him down a bit, he'll come up and win again. Bound to—couldn't help it." The seedy young man spoke hopefully, though he realised that his companion was unlikely to be inspired by undue optimism.

"Well, now, I might hear of someone," observed 'Airy pensively, dry-shaving his chin with his forefinger and thumb.

"Get me a good price, and I'll make you a nice present, 'Airy."

"Now you're talking," replied his companion, sitting up and taking notice. "I always make it so much for an introduction to a likely client, so much for my goodwill and so much for a deal. What d'ye want for the old horse?"

"Eighteen hundred."

"That's a big figure for an exposed horse," replied 'Airy, wondering if he could get two thousand out of Potts. "Daresay I can get you fifteen 'undred. Then take fifty for introduction, fifty for goodwill and a hundred for the deal; that gives you a round thirteen 'undred."

"No, I reckon he's worth eighteen hundred to someone." 'Airy appeared deep in thought with one eye closed, then taking a long breath and blowing out his cheeks, he decided magnanimously to stretch a point in favour of both parties.

"Well, say I get you eighteen 'undred; then we'll make it one—one—one; total, three 'undred from eighteen 'undred, that leaves fifteen 'undred for your pocket and no inquiries."

"Not good enough," replied Horace, shaking his head, though really determined not to close the negotiations.

"Well, sell him if you can, my lad, and good luck to you," rejoined 'Airy, draining his glass and pretending he must be off.

But Horace, though somewhat perturbed at 'Airy's apparently casual interest in the deal, had no intention of allowing this likely purchaser to slip through his fingers so easily.

"Stop a minute!" he exclaimed. "I've a good mind to reconsider that offer of yours if you're sure you can put it through." He thrust his hands into his pocket,

and was pained to encounter a solitary threepenny bit. Though this did not actually represent the total of his ready cash, it give him an unpleasant premonition of what coming events might have in store for him, if he refused the chance of a good offer.

'Airy turned back and remarked genially,

"That's right, 'Orace; you can be sure I'm doing the best for you. No paper transactions, just the word of a gentleman is enough between us two. What's yours?" He beckoned to the bar tender.

"Dry Martini, thank you, 'Airy."

"Right—a couple of 'em," he shouted to the ministering angel on the far side of the barrier.

After drinking good luck to each other, the two parted company, 'Airy remarking very truly that his friend's interests were his own, and that he could rely on him to do his damndest.

That same evening Mr. Hiels got to work on Sir Joseph. They were sitting late over their wine in the Kingsmede dining-room, both men having drawn their chairs round the big open fire. Sir Joseph was leaning back, with his little fat legs stuck straight out in front of him. In his hand he held a bumper of port, and with one eye closed, he sat gazing at the reflections of the blazing logs through the ruby contents of his glass. At intervals he would take a long, leisurely gulp, as though endeavouring to let the wine travel its course as slowly as possible; which operation would be followed by reminiscent smacks of his lips in silent worship of Bacchus.

Like all successful diplomats, 'Airy did not raise the subject until he considered that the psychological moment had arrived: to use his own words, when he thought Joe was well oiled. In fact they had come to the brandy-and-cigar stage before he embarked on the problem in hand. He then worked up Sir Joseph's

enthusiasm on his chances of winning the big local steeplechase. He discoursed on the advantages, social and otherwise, if Joe could but win this year and follow up his success in succeeding years, and gradually enlarged his host's field of activities on the Turf, when eventually the sporting papers would allude to "That popular owner, Sir J. Potts, whose well-known colours," etc., etc. He metaphorically painted a pleasing futurist portrait of his host, in which he appeared as a prominent owner, a patron of the turf, a man who rode good horses as well as owned them. Probably one day he would be a steward of the N.H. Committee and the Jockey Club, and even a member of the Turf Club.

'Airy was rather confused in his own mind about the actual status of the latter. Very exclusive, of course, compared to his own club—the Albert—in fact a sort of R.Y.S., only the members had to own race-horses instead of yachts.

All the while Sir Joseph was visibly swelling with pride in contemplation of the good fortune predicted by his friend.

First of all, he stretched his little legs still further out, then, placing a stout calf over his other knee and balancing his evening shoe on his toe, he kept it see-sawing up and down, to the rhythmic beats of the swinging pendulum of the large grandfather clock at the far end of the room. Well lubricated with old brandy, he was turning the various points over in his mind. However, being a man of business, and when sober a very shrewd one, he still withheld from involving himself in any ambitious schemes on the Turf.

His instinct told him that 'Airy probably wanted to sell him some of his own recently acquired yearlings, and even in his bibulous condition, he reasoned, that if they were not any use to 'Airy, they would be even less use to Sir J. P.

As soon as 'Airy noticed that Sir Joseph was not immediately forthcoming, he was cunning enough to appreciate what was passing through his host's mind, and instantly decided to dispel the idea.

"You know you ought to have another 'chaser, Joe, if you can find one," he remarked, and Sir Joseph immediately relaxes.

"Why d'ye think so, 'Airy?"

"Well, you see, it's like this. You'll never do no good with only one horse at Curlieu's, for this reason. A trainer don't take the same interest in a single horse, and also you can't get him to try your horse out with another that will give you a true line to his form. Now, if you had something there of your own that you know the form of, you would know what class Chassepot was. Then you would put your money on and make it pay."

"But supposin' 'e don't win? You know the old hadage—'Fast women, slow 'orses!' The road to ruin of many a good sportsman."

'Airy nodded a solemn head in response.

"But you'll know, barring accidents, in this class of race what's what after a trial with your own quad whose form you know. If Chassepot don't acquit himself as we hope he may, then don't throw good money arter bad, backing him to win. Sometimes it don't pay to win. But that's a study in itself! My plan for you is, speculation with due precaution."

"Well, 'Airy, I makes no doubt you're right. But it's short notice to buy another horse for our purpose. You can't buy them on the 'phone like stocks and shares."

"Well, Joe, I admit it's not easy, but I'll do anything I can to help you, old boy," said 'Airy patronisingly. "In fact, I might get you one now for a couple of thou. There's that horse Lucifer, but I doubt if his owner would part. He's worth more nor that."

"I calls that a lot of money for a 'chaser now the season's at a hend," observes Potts, who had discovered that a house in Park Lane and a large estate and establishment in the country were a heavy drain even on his income.

"My dear old boy, you're wrong: I'll tell you for why. Just think of yearlings fetching round about £15,000 at Doncaster sales."

"That's true, I admit." Sir Joseph was evidently impressed by the comparison, and 'Airy shrewdly followed up this advantage.

"Mind you, Joe, it would never do for me to say it was you as wanted the horse, or you wouldn't get him for two thousand. But I might, p'rhaps, get him myself at that price. Still, I don't want to press you. I know you landed gentry aren't as wealthy as you were. But remember the Turf depends on your sporting spirit to exist."

It was obvious that this subtle bit of flattery had gone down well, from the way that Sir Joseph, with a thoughtful air, first blew out his cheeks, then a cloud of cigar smoke, as though pondering over the impoverishment of a twentieth-century nobleman due to his many commitments and the land taxes.

Apparently he had made up his mind as he turned round to his friend and pronounced:

"I don't say but what you're right about Curlieu. But mark you, two thousand is my limit for this 'ere 'orse."

'Airy assumed an expression of dubiety.

"Now, Joe, look 'ere," he explains, leaning forward and tapping his friend's knee with his forefinger, "I didn't promise I could get him for that figure, but if we're lucky enough to find he will part, I'll do what I can. What about another drop of brandy, old boy, on the strength of it?"

"Why not?" replied his host, filling his own glass and passing the bottle.

They sat smoking and sipping till they had finished the liqueur brandy, by which time Sir Joseph was in the best of humours, and picturing himself as Senior Steward of the Jockey Club, and, in fact, a very great man in the field of sport. He was just dosing off and dreaming that he and his brother stewards were investigating the case of some unscrupulous owner; to his horror, the delinquent is none other than his old friend 'Airy, who is saying, "It's all very well, Joe, but you had half shares in the filly yourself—you must have made a packet over her." The outraged members first wink at each other in that obvious way that is so discomfiting to the odd man out, then nudge each other in the ribs, and finally, rising to a man, they denounce their brother steward. Their recently serene countenances become suddenly convulsed with rage and righteous indignation; ink-pots, Ruff's Guides, leather-bound editions of the Stud Book, and other suitable missiles come hurtling across the room, when fortunately Sir Joseph woke up with a start, just in time to catch some remark of 'Airy's about his host having a half share in one of his yearlings.

"Yes, Joe," he was repeating, "if you 'ave the wish you can go half shares in that nice Daydream filly—you might make a packet over her."

"Twelve o'clock!" exclaims Sir Joseph, listening to the grandfather clock and ignoring his guest's generous offer. "Time we went to bed, 'Enry."

Then, rising with the portentous expression of a man immune from temptation of any description, the expression that exactly befits a future steward of the Jockey Club, in his own estimation, he rang the bell. A few seconds later the two sportsmen, with arms linked more with a view to mutual support than from any

marked feeling of affection, wended their way with unsteady steps up the broad staircase to their respective rooms.

The net result of the foregoing conversation was, that Potts got the horse, 'Airy got a monkey, and young Horace £1,500.

'Airy's conscience is apparently quite clear over the transaction. As he says to himself, he had to take the risk—in fact, two risks. One that 'Orace might talk, and the other that Joe might hear. A secret's like a snowball, the further it's rolled the bigger it gets, and you can't be sure which way it will roll.

However, up to date all is well, and on the morning that Crusader did his two-and-a-half mile gallop over fences, our friends motored over to Batford to see Chassepot tried with Lucifer at level weights.

Evidently the trial was most successful, as, two furlongs from home, Chassepot was striding away from Lucifer and still taking a strong hold, when 'Airy pulled him up.

"That's good enough for our job!" he exclaims, coming up to Potts, who had been standing looking on with the Curlieu family.

"Easy money, I reckon," says Sir Joseph confidently.

"What I can't understand is, why the horse never won in France," mutters old Curlieu. "He ran unplaced several times as a youngster, and, in my opinion, he's a high-class horse that should have won on the flat."

"Daresay the French chap didn't know 'ow to train 'im," suggests his owner, with a knowing wink.

"Well, I don't want no better ride over fences; and you can take it from me, Joe, he'll win you good-class chases," opines 'Airy enthusiastically. "Wot's more, I'm very near fit myself, and will be in another week."

"Yes," interposes Judy, "we'll have the horse fit, and it's up to you to be the same Mr. Hiels. You won't give him another school over fences, will you, father?"

"No, he doesn't want any more jumping," rejoins the old man, realising that Judy does not intend to allow it, and his consent is merely a matter of form.

No doubt there were at least half a dozen owners equally enthusiastic about the chances of their horses in this race, as is generally the case; how else could the poor bookmakers hope to live?"

CHAPTER XIX

THE LONG ARM OF COINCIDENCE

Archie Languid strolled into his club to breakfast before leaving by the 10.15 a.m. train for Bickhampton. He paused for a moment to select a table in the sun, and gave his orders to the waiter. There was only one other occupant of the room, and he was breakfasting tête-à-tête with *The Times*.

Suddenly from behind the paper barrier Archie caught the remark:

"Waiter, I'd like some Oxford marmalade if there is any."

He thought he recognised the voice, and, taking the liberty of looking over *The Times* at his companion, he started up in astonishment.

"Well, I'm damned!" he drawled. "Old X., by all that's holy! I had no idea you were home, old chap, though I did notice one or two horses entered in your name in several races lately."

"Why, Archie, old lad, this is luck!" His companion wrung the outstretched hand. "I only got back a fortnight ago, and was going to amuse myself by having an occasional ride in a chase this spring. I sent home four horses last summer, two from Australia and two from New Zealand. I know they can jump, and the New Zealanders are quite useful."

"You aren't having a ride to-day, are you?" asked Archie, sitting down at his old friend's table.

"No, I only paid a visit to the National Hunt

Stewards at Weatherby's a few days ago. Apparently I had to be interviewed to make sure I was still a gentleman and qualified to ride as an amateur. Of course when I got there I found we were all old friends, and we passed the time of day together."

A bright idea strikes Archie. "Look here, if you've nothing better to do, why not come down to Bickhampton with me this morning? I'll put you up at my place after the races. You know, of course, your lately-owned horse, Crusader, is running?"

The other man's face expanded in a pleased smile.

"The deuce he is! Then I'll come gladly, and many thanks. I remember old Sir Joseph Potts bought him after I sailed for Australia. He was a most charming horse."

"Well, he's now got a charming owner! Old Potts was a bit too cumbersome on that class of horse, and he sold him to Diana Gibson. It's a real treat to see them sailing over a country. Her cousin, Dick Phennell, is going to ride him to-day, and I think he may very likely win, though there are one or two quite good-class horses in the race. I'm afraid it'll be awfully heavy, as they've had a lot of rain down there the last two days, in spite of the sunshine this morning."

"Heavy, eh? That ought to suit Crusader. I consider he's the best stayer I ever rode, and I believe he'll have a nice turn of speed when it comes to racing."

At this juncture a waiter materialises.

"A gentleman called in a taxi for you, sir," he murmured discreetly in Archie's ear, "and he's ordered your dressing-case to be put on while he's having his hair cut."

"Tell them to put Mr. Postlethwaite's bag on as well. That's right, isn't it, X.?"

"Yes, tell the valet to pack my things and put them on the same taxi. How soon do we start?"

"In ten minutes," Archie declares, looking at his watch.

The gentleman who had called for Archie and was now getting his hair cut was Hugo Ellis.

On hearing that Mr. Languid was breakfasting with a Mr. Postlethwaite, he had inquired with astonishment, "Not Mr. Xenophon Postlethwaite?"

"The same, sir," replied the hall porter.

"Well, I'm damned!" he ejaculated. "I call that a rum coincidence and a jolly good omen for Dick."

Forty minutes later all three men had boarded the train for Bickhampton.

Ever since the early morning of the day before the races the little country town had been besieged by the flotsam and jetsam of humanity that ekes out a happy-go-lucky existence following in the train of successive race meetings. Some cheery, good-natured rascals, others knaves of a deeper dye, all living in an atmosphere of stale beer, tobacco smoke and boiled tripe.

To-day the trees along the road are grotesquely plastered with papers advertising the attendance of innumerable firms of well-known and reliable bookmakers. These firms apparently spring up like mushrooms, their organisers changing their names as expediency may demand.

Further on we see the pink edition of *Sporting Snippets*, which has all the winners for Bickhampton, and many other hideous contrivances of the same kind vie with each other in vulgarising what are usually quiet country roads. On the left of the road can now be seen the grand stand, the white rails of the course, and the paddock at the far end. Beyond the enclosures are swinging-boats and vast merry-go-rounds that are destined to keep the night alive with flaring lights and discordant recurrent tunes. Coconut shies, Aunt

Sallies and various types of refreshment booths are opening up, their presence being advertised by the raucous cries of their respective proprietors calling their wares. Vendors of hot roast chestnuts compete with Italian ice-cream merchants and sellers of green lemonade, each gambling on the vagaries of the English spring weather.

Amongst early arrivals on the course this morning are the usual spurious tipsters. A gentleman in a top hat, frock coat and yellow boots stands under a large placard announcing that the one and original Mr. Tizzey is here to meet his clients personally, and already country bumpkins are paying homage in coin to the sage. Another gentleman dressed as a jockey, and described as the "Well-known Australian Crack Rider," is reminding his audience how he had given his patrons the winner of the Derby. On that occasion he was fortunate enough to have travelled down with the owner, and so he got it straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak. This time he is again in luck for his clients, as only last night he was dining at his club in London with some of to-day's owners and trainers. He cannot, of course, give their names away, as they have given him the information in confidence. But those who wish can buy his tips, and he begs them not to divulge the information broadcast, or they will get no price, once it is known from whom it originates.

Outside the turnstiles into the enclosure is a sailor with two wooden legs, wishing everyone luck and hoping they won't forget him if they have a successful meeting.

The usual nigger minstrels have all turned up, and weather-beaten, dark-eyed gipsy dames are telling fortunes to blushing country damsels and their swains.

A gentleman is performing the three-card trick on an open umbrella, and appears to be losing a large fortune,

as his various accomplices successfully spot the lady and walk off triumphantly with their half-crowns. If it were not for those frequent hurried decampments due to officious police encroaching on the scene of action he would soon net the usual gullible countrymen, now that they see how easy it is to find the queen.

Overloaded chars-a-bancs begin to make their appearance, and as they get blocked in the throng of vehicles, their occupancs break out in hackneyed chorus of ancient music-hall songs.

Cabs and motors from the station bring well-nourished bookmakers and their clerks, with their usual impedimenta of bags and stands. The smaller fry of the profession who operate outside the enclosures walk to the course, the clerks, carrying giant umbrellas, marching in rear of their principals, who are armed with bags slung over their chests containing tickets and a handful of small change.

Stolid country people huddled on the footpaths, press on, the ladies of the parties trying to avoid the mud spattering of the chars-a-bancs and motors. The older members are dressed in their best black especially reserved for weddings, funerals and the races.

The large detachment of county police are having their work cut out in their good-humoured endeavours to control the ever-increasing mass of traffic, and amid the din of mouth organs, concertinas and cornets, each playing an air of its owner's own choice, it is impossible to hear one's own voice.

Soldiers and sailors on furlough, shopkeepers from the neighbouring town, country people from everywhere are mustering to the races and the dense crowd is rapidly treading the green grass into slush.

In spite of the sunshine to-day the going will be soggy and heavy.

Farmers and their families, with jolly red faces, and

all firmly determined to enjoy themselves, arrive in their gigs or harsh-engined motor cars.

More affluent types are now making their appearance, and amongst them we can recognise many of our friends, as the police divert their cars on to the road for the private motor enclosure.

Urchins push their heads into the windows, shouting, " Kerrect card of the races—Card and markin' pencil ! " which they offer at double the official price.

Diana has got her beloved " Pauper " with her for the great occasion. He and Lady Mary are in an even greater state of excitement than the two younger people.

Yesterday Dick and Diana had walked the course in the pouring rain and tried to judge the shortest way between the fences, and to note where the going was particularly heavy. There was one fence, just before the far turn where Dick had decided that it would pay him lengths if he jumped it at an angle which would land him heading right for the turn beyond. Excellent, no doubt, provided he avoided any collision in doing so.

Early this morning he had taken Crusader out for a pipe-opener. The horse had come back and eaten up his feed, leaving a clean manger four hours before his race, and then had been boxed, departing by train with the lad that " did " him, together with old Stubbs.

When Dick came back from his gallop he found that Diana had put a white silk scarf and a pair of silk stockings in his room. He remembered he had said he was not sure if he had any with him.

" By Jove ! She is an angel—she never forgets anything ! " he said to himself, then, picking the articles up, he remarked quite solemnly, " I feel quite romantic ! Of course I never could be good enough for her, but I can't help loving her. If we win—by gad—I—I will——"

He makes the same resolution again, this time in the changing-room as he pulls on the long silk stockings.

The Rushworth party are much too interested in their own affairs to take any notice of the two selling races that open the day's sport. Time flies, and already

Dick.

the first two events on the card are over, and many of us barely know what has won.

The horses engaged in the big race of the day are now being led into the enclosure.

Archie and his friend are intensely interested.

"Let's get the numbers, have a look at Crusader and then walk down to the big fence at the bottom,"

says he to Xenophon. "We'll have time to walk back to see the finish from there."

"Right ho!" agrees X., and off they go.

No. 1. That's Mr. Bullock's Triumph, ridden by Lumley. A very useful brown horse that has won twice this year and carries 10 lbs. penalty. He'll certainly run well.

No. 2. Hop It. A chestnut getting on in years and carrying a similar penalty. Rider, Mr. Redfern.

No. 3. Harlequin, another chestnut, trained and ridden by Willy Black. Carries 7 lbs. penalty; looks well and sure to put up a good performance.

Nos. 4 and 5 not going.

No. 6. Ryehead. A nice grey mare, fell the last time out; rider, Tommy Trout.

No. 7. Chassepot. Looking a picture, for which Judy Curlieu is justly proud. But, as she remarked to her father, "He's sweating and fretful; quite a different horse. You're probably right, Dad; he's had a gruelling as a youngster and remembers it now." H. Hiels, his rider, looks the part all over. He and Sir Joseph should land a nice bit if the horse performs as well as he can at home.

No. 8. Dumpling. A mealy-brown gelding—looks out of his class. Rider, Captain Sharpe.

No. 9. Crusader. Quality and symmetry combined, a high-class chaser all over. Though the horse has no experience racing, his rider, Dick Phennell, is fairly confident of being pretty handy at the finish. In fact, he and Diana have put £25 on between them as a bonus for the stable should the horse win.

No. 10. The Rat.
No. 11. Camperdown.
No. 12. Put and Take.
} unless the rest fall have no chance.

No. 13. Firefly. Chestnut five-year-old, with three white legs. Gets allowance for her age, and was expected

to win a good race early on. Since then Mr. Ramp, her rider, has managed to get her a hunter's certificate

Chassepot's connections. H. Hicls, his rider, looks the part all over.

and she has been kept for this race. They have backed her well.

That's eleven starters for the £500 Hunters' Race, three and a half miles and a trying course, too.

They start down below the hill to the right, come past the stand on a right-handed course, pass the stand again, and finish the next time round.

It's a pretty stiff hill up to the stand, and down at the bottom end, parallel to the canal, it will ride very heavy after the last two days' downpour.

Hulloa! there goes the bell and requests to "Mount, please, gentlemen!" The jockeys, stripped of their overcoats, now blossom out in every hue and tint, like butterflies emerging from the chrysalis stage.

"Bless you both, and good luck!"

Let us try to get some of the colours into our mind's eye. Dick's are blue with grey sleeves and cap. Mr. Hiels' are magenta and yellow quartered, with purple cap. Triumph's jockey, Lumley, green, pink cap. Willy Black on Harlequin, grey, yellow cap. Mr. Ramp on Firefly, crimson, and orange stripes, orange sleeves and cap.

All the jockeys are up now, and as old Stubbs leads Dick out, Diana pats her horse on the neck with a low-voiced "Bless you both, and good luck!"

She would have liked to have given Dick a friendly

little pat on the knee, but, being a well-brought-up young lady, she refrains from any outward expression of her feelings. She felt terribly nervous, and her heart was fluttering like a captive bird, but she was determined to conceal all outward signs of emotion. Dick caught a last glimpse of her and little David disappearing in the crowd as he turned out of the paddock on to the course.

We have just time to get up in the stand and see the horses cantering to the post.

Triumph is a taking horse in his gallop, but he has not the scope or freedom of Crusader, who goes through the mud with no sign of any effort. Certainly Chassepot is a slashing great horse, but he seems upset, and already is sweating freely.

The chestnut Harlequin is favourably commented on, though he appears to gallop a bit higher than the last two.

Hop It is a bit stilty, he stays, but probably has not the speed he had.

Ryehead, the grey mare, is on the small side and pulls hard.

The only other that stands out is Firefly, the chestnut five-year-old.

Look at old Dumpling, going with his head on his chest and his knees in the air! He can never live with the best of them.

Imagine Diana's excitement watching the start from the top of the stand. She has got her glasses on Dick, and is watching Crusader, who stands quietly facing the tapes. Hullo! They're off. No! What's that horse? He's through the tapes, and two in the middle have turned round, while the chestnut carrying the crimson colours appears to be clearing a space round it, kicking out viciously with both heels. Once again they are all in line facing the tapes. Diana imagines

she can hear the starter call out, "Are you all ready?" The line moves forward simultaneously. Some one standing near her shouts out, "They're off!" and the bell confirms the fact, as the wave of bright colours dashes forward towards the first fence.

Now a race is a difficult thing for the uninitiated to follow, and even more difficult to describe, and the following details were obtained under rather unusual circumstances. But as corroborated by all concerned, they appear to be singularly accurate, and are the result of most unusual phenomena.

During three successive nights after the race, Dick dreamt that he had a conversation with Crusader. Each dream was exactly similar, but it was not till after the third night that he could remember the facts, when Lady Mary wrote them down exactly as he dictated them. The following account is word for word as repeated on each night by Crusader. Dick was apparently sitting on the manger in the loose box, and except for occasional pauses, when the horse would rub his nose either against an outstretched foreleg or occasionally against Dick's shoulder, the conversation continued without interruption.

"Well," said Crusader, "I must start with the morning of the race, because certain things impressed me then. That sharp spin we had first thing in the morning was good value. It cleared my pipes, and dispelled the excess of pent-up nervous ebullition that we horses are subject to when we're being fed and trained especially for a race. I thought you might like to know that."

"Most interesting, old boy," said Dick earnestly, taking in every word.

"Then, of course, I was ready for my drink and feed just the same as usual. In fact, I never felt better in

my life. When a horse is really fit he is ready for his food and ready for his work. His sinews are hard, his muscles tough yet flexible, and covered by a silky coat that feels soft and elastic. He experiences no effort in breathing, and the fresh air in his lungs appears to electrify his whole system. In fact, he feels that he can chase eagles over mountains, impelled by some nervous energy that no weight can tire."

"Good!" said Dick. "I rather thought that. That's the sort of feel a fit horse gives you when you're on him."

"But," continued Crusader, "there's one thing I mustn't forget. Old Stubbs and William the lad, who 'does' me, are worth their weight in gold. Few people realise what it is to study a horse, to know when he's not feeling just A.1., to recognise when and how much he wants to eat and drink, to groom him vigorously, but at the same time comfortably without irritating him. A bang over the loins and the unremitting use of a hard prickly brush on a thin skin is like a constant nightmare to some unfortunate horses." Crusader shook himself violently at the thought of it, and continued, "Every evening before they went to bed those two used to peep quietly into my box. The night before the race the old man looked in when I was feeding up, and said, 'The horse couldn't be better nor he is.' I gave two kicks at the boarding of my box to show that I understood. Then as they walked away I heard him say, 'You mark my words, Will, he's a-goin' to take some beatin' to-morrow. I shouldn't be surprised to see him win, that I wouldn't.' That was the first time I realised that I was going to race. But I felt so well, it didn't worry me in any way. I remember my mother telling me how my sire won nine races off the reel, and I felt—in fact, I hoped—that I would be allowed to do

the same thing. Then, of course, the train journey meant nothing to me; you see, I travelled in a boat from Ireland when I was five years old."

"Yes, of course you did!" observed Dick. "I forgot that."

"I must confess to feeling a bit excited when I first got on to the course. But that was entirely due to the noise and hubbub all round, which was strange to me, but I wasn't going to show I cared, not if I could help it. Then when they saddled me up in that stall I kicked a couple of times."

William.

"I've often wondered why horses do that. Even quite placid ones do," observed Dick, with a puzzled expression on his face.

"We do that," explained Crusader, "because we can never tell how tight a man may not pull the girths in his enthusiasm before a race. Besides, I wanted to look my best parading round the paddock, and a couple of kicks are good for the circulation and make our coats lie down and shine in the sun. I tried to show myself off to the best advantage with my mane and tail plaited."

"You conceited old rascal!" interposed Dick, as the horse stopped for a moment to rub his head against his companion's waistcoat.

"I really wanted to do credit to old Stubbs and William for all the care they had taken of me. You should have seen Stubbs when I was being plated before the race; the old man examined each of my feet and felt all round to make sure there were no clinches sticking up beyond the horn."

"Yes, isn't he an old topper? And he's awfully fond of you, Crusader," remarked Dick earnestly.

"When we walked across to the paddock the crowd cleared out of the way, saying, 'By Jove, that's a nice horse! What's his name? Number nine, Crusader.' I suppose horses appreciate admiration more than any other animal. We know instinctively when we fill the eye of an onlooker, and it was pleasing to hear flattering remarks from the different spectators leaning on the railings."

"Tell me, are fillies more conceited than colts?" interrupted Dick.

"No, not necessarily," replied Crusader, "but they're much more inquisitive, just the same as girls. Well, I had a good look round the other horses parading there. Chassepot certainly showed class, but I would have liked to have told you all I know about him. I was surprised to see Firefly run as well as she did."

"She was carrying 10 lbs. less than you, Crusader," Dick reminded him.

"Well, at any rate, now the race is over, I don't mind telling you that I could have carried another stone, and still ought to have beaten her comfortably."

"I'm quite sure of it," agreed Dick, affectionately pulling the horse's ear.

"Then I was glad of that canter up to the post. It had the same effect on me as the morning spin, and it gave me an idea of the going and how I felt in my plates. I should say you can't have horses' plates too light, provided they're strong enough to withstand the racket of a race. A horse can't gallop in heavy shoes, any more than a man can run in waders. It's the one place he can't carry extra weight, at the end of his limbs. By the way, I did appreciate Diana patting me on the neck when we went out. These little things mean quite a lot to a horse, especially when he is in the midst

of strange surroundings. It soothes the nerves, and one feels in that huge mass of humanity there's real live sympathy and at least one person who understands."

Crusader paused to take a drink from the bucket in the corner of his box. When he turned round the expression in his eye had completely changed. Before it was docile, now it looked bold and venturesome. He then commenced his account of the actual race in a doggerel rhyme of his own, yet there was a sort of galloping rhythm about the metre.

CRUSADER'S ACCOUNT OF THE RACE

While waiting to start, could you feel my heart thumping
Through weight-cloth and pig-skin right through to your knee?
A bay nearly kicked us, the grey started plunging;
A jockey behind us yelled "Hi! wait for me."
At his field in disorder, the starter was swearing,
"Hold back on the chestnut, come up on the black!"
For riders were craning, and horses were boring,
Now some flashing forrard, now some turning back.
Up went the tape, then, a wild, raging torrent,
We gained a clean run at the fence as we led,
'Twas as well that we did so, for Triumph jumped crooked.
Once clear of the ruck we soon forged right ahead.
We were now out in front, and you steadied my pace, though
I strained at the rein, as the others drew near;
In the van there were Chassepot, with Firefly and Hop It,
Then Harlequin, Triumph and the flashy grey mare.
The rest of the field, playing follow my leader,
Ne'er came in the picture, for that I'll go bail,
So we charged the next fence like an incoming breaker,
And though all landed safely, two shins grazed the rail.
I stood back the limit—though knowing we'd clear it,
I asked for more freedom—you giving me rein;
We gained half a length, and so, both taking courage,
We swung round the bend, throwing mud in our train.
With his spurs in her flanks, came the chestnut mare's jockey,
Pulling Firefly across us to get on the rail;
You checked me from cutting her tendons to ribbons,
So we swallowed the insult and clung to her tail.

Still holding the inside, with off fore-leg leading,
We rounded the bend—black and chestnut in front,
Whilst outside were Harlequin, Hop It and Triumph,
With the jock' on the grey pulling hard at his mount.
Beyond lay the ditch with its green-painted guard rail,
(Though once one can see it, there's nothing to fear).
We measured our stride, and then, speedily gauging
The height of the birch twigs, we reckoned to clear.
'Midst the racket and jostle we each judged our take-off,
The leaders in front and the sluggards astern,

"We charged the next fence like an incoming breaker."

With Harlequin stretched to keep level beside us,
We'd gained coming round a full length on the turn.
First over were Chassepot and Firefly, locked level,
Their stifle joints skimming, toes scarce off the ground;
Then together we rise; with hocks taut and straightened
And fore-legs extended, we land safe and sound.
Two plated hoofs rattled the guard-rail behind us,
Bright colours kaleidoscoped around in the air,
While the hard-pulling grey got away with her rider
And closed in the gap that the leaders left spare.
Five in a bunch, and one of them riderless,
The blaze on his muzzle align with your knee,
Should he swerve at the fence, let's hope it's left-handed,

" Five in a bunch and one of them riderless,
The blaze on his muzzle align with your knee."

But he cleared it the best, jumping faultless and free.
The pace was a cracker, the field now spreadeagled,
Like leaves in the autumn, swept past in a gale,
The fence ahead quivered, the gorse prickles scattered,
And the grey held a whin-bush fast on to her tail.
Once over the gorse fence I wanted to push on,
In spite of the going I couldn't restrain
My eager endeavours, but wisely you held me,
Though I snatched at my bridle and reached at the rein.
We now settled down to a good striding gallop,
A low fence ahead with broad wings, flags on pegs;
In a flash we were over –I just caught a glimmer
Of blue sky reflected between my fore-legs.
Behind us resounded a splash in the water,
When gallant old Hop It came down with a thud—
He'd collided with Triumph, whose weight sent him flying,
Both jockey and horse slithered yards in the mud.
For three or four furlongs we thus kept our places,
To the open ditch standing two-thirds up the hill,
When the grey crashed the fence, and, with neck twisted double,
She rolled on her side, whilst her jockey lay still.
Though she fell where we landed, my shoes never touched her,
Yet avoiding her rider we surely lost ground,
Since Triumph shot into our place on the railings,
And the luck for him was we were now swinging round.
For a time we're obliged to accept this position,
From the left-swerving Triumph we had to keep clear,
As along past the stands we rattled like thunder
I thought we had slipped him; again he drew near,
Then, forcing the pace down the hill, we got going,
Each stride brought us nearer the first leading pair,
Whilst Triumph and Harlequin clung to us gamely,
Since neither'd been baulked by the falling grey mare.
Triumph's jockey was riding and striving to hold us;
At the drop fence you gave him an ample wide berth,
But in mid-air I heard both your stirrup irons clashing,
Right thankful I was when we came safe to earth.
At last we were free from his left-handed tacking,
The birch fence at the turn we now took on the swerve,
While Harlequin, racing to get to our shoulder,
Was forced to swing wide as we came round the curve.
In the low-lying pastures along the canal bank
Triumph's fetlock bent double, he limped now with pain,
Old Harlequin clouted the fence at the corner,

"We turned a clean somersault over the wing."

But his rider, thrown clear, got up holding the rein.
Once more o'er the water we skimmed like a swallow
As, stretched to our utmost, we sailed through the air;
Though we took off too soon, our pace carried us over,
And I'll swear that we landed with three feet to spare.
I thought, Well, we'll catch them whenever you wish now—
With Firefly fast tiring and Chassepot's ears back,
And when urged by his rider his tail gave a swish now:
In a fight to a finish I knew he would crack!
Just four lengths from the fence we drew to his quarters,
And I thought when we challenged he almost stood still,
But rolling he bumped us, we both pecked on landing,
And the light-weighted filly slipped on up the hill.
Still, I'd not been extended, and now, when you asked me,
I put on the pace and we closed to her side,
There was only the last fence that slopes away from you,
I could smother the mare if I jumped in my stride.
Then her jockey glanced round, and he pulled right across us,
I could see by his look that he'd planned the foul thing,
With a sickening crash, and the splitting of timber,
We turned a clean somersault over the wing.
In a flash a new rider had leapt on my saddle,
As you lay on the ground and I stood by your side;
And again under way with both stirrup irons dangling,
We were going all out. Gad! this fellow could ride!
With the lead they had gained could we possibly reach them?
They were half up the straight, with the post now in sight,
Each stride I was gaining, the mare now was flagging,
If she changed her legs once, we could still win the fight.
Both my rider and I were determined to catch them,
And passing the grand stand we heard the crowd cheer.
Ramp, of course, had his whip out, his only intention
To baulk me from reaching the fast-sinking mare.
I thought of my sire, and the thought made me bolder,
Ears cocked and limbs stretched in the last final run.
My nose reached her croup, next her girth, then her shoulder,
Another few strides and the race would be won!

. . . . . .

Crusader paused for a moment and impetuously pawed the floor of his box, then resumed his doggerel rhymes with an alteration in the metre, giving the impression that he was galloping all out in a supreme effort to snatch victory from defeat. Thus he continued:

" Again under way with both stirrup irons dangling."

A flash of white railing—blurred faces in rows—
I thrust out my neck, I stretched from my toes :
The next stride I caught her and just passed her nose.
As we both cleared the post, well, she nearly stopped dead,
Her heaving flanks mottled with sweat bloody red,
And when I looked back we were three lengths ahead.
The mare wasn't crooked, 'twas the ruffian that made her ;
Her ribs were all scarred where her jockey had flayed her.
Then my rider pulled up with a " Well done, Crusader ! "

. . . . . .

Jogging back to the paddock, 'midst a clamorous scene,
I looked on the number board. What could it mean ?
My number was nine, but the first was thirteen.

Crusader paused for another drink.

" My dear old boy," said Dick, caressing him, " I simply can't bear to think what you went through."

" Well, it was worse for you," replied Crusader, resuming his story. " I only wish you'd been there. They cheered us to the echo when we came in to off-saddle, the crowd pressing round as we walked to the weighing enclosure. They gave three cheers for Crusader and three more for his rider. Dear old Stubbs was half crying and half laughing. There seemed to be tremendous commotion and excitement. My heart ached for old Stubbs, he seemed so unhappy when he led us in, and yet I knew the old man was proud of me. Everyone was sympathetic and kind, but it was poor consolation for losing a race we had all set our hearts on. Mine was a heavy heart."

" Poor old son ! " murmured Dick, laying a hand on his mane, " you make me feel quite sad."

" Eventually," continued Crusader, " I found myself being unsaddled in the same enclosure as Firefly. Mr. Ramp looked very sullen, and asked X. what he was doing there. I think he answered ' That's my business,' gave me a pat on the quarter and disappeared. Later, Chassepot, sweating and jaded, joined us in the same

enclosure, and his rider dashed off in a hurry without saying a word. I recognised Sir Joseph Potts, who told someone he was a fool not to have kept that 'orse 'imself, and I felt more than grateful that he hadn't done so. We were in that enclosure a long time, then I started to graze, and the crowd hung around watching us while Stubbs and Will rubbed me down.

"Suddenly I heard a storm of cheers from the building on the right, and it grew louder as it got nearer, like thunder rolling up through the clouds. I stood still and snorted. Next moment old Stubbs threw his hat in the air. I never knew he could be so boisterous. He is such a quiet old man as a rule. Before I knew what happened, Diana had slipped under the rails and kissed me on the nose. She couldn't speak, but I understood and was happy."

That is the end of Dick's dream, and the most striking feature of this chapter of incidents is the fact that he never could have known himself what happened after his fall. What we saw from the stand was this: Up the hill the last time round Crusader started to overhaul Chassepot. "Your horse's beat," someone observed to Sir Joseph. "Not 'alf; 'e'll come again, you see," replied his owner. Suddenly his looks belied the confidence of his optimistic retort, then his jaw fell as Crusader challenged and left the black horse standing. Sir Joseph's glasses dropped from his hands as he heard the bookmakers calling out "10 to 1 Chassepot! 10 to 1 Chassepot!" at the top of their voices. In the meantime Crusader had closed up to Firefly. Coming to the last fence, Ramp deliberately pulled his mare across the horse, who struck the wing, and Dick and he rolled over together. X. and Archie were standing by the fence. Crusader was on his legs again in a couple of seconds none the worse for the spill, and in less time

than it takes to tell X. was on his back, leaving Archie to attend to Dick. Then we saw X. coming up the straight, the horse under him, with tremendous speed and dash, rapidly gaining on the leader. It was only a matter of seconds when he must smother her, at the pace he was going, compared to the mare. Two lengths from the post he was up to her quarters. Ramp was riding a vigorous finish, his whip in his right hand, whirling round like the arm of a propeller in his efforts to keep the mare's nose in front past the post. Was it possible? The crowd surged and swayed and shrieked with excitement, as in the two strides Crusader gained the ascendancy, drawing first level, then outdistancing his rival as they passed beyond the judge's box. From where we were standing it looked like a dead heat, though beyond the winning-post the horse had shot out lengths ahead of the mare. However, the verdict was in her favour.

Diana, who, with beating heart, had been watching the race from the top of the stand with the younger Baynham boy, nearly fainted when she saw Dick fall and lay still on the ground. She stood a few seconds pale and shivering, then looked at little David, who was standing beside her, and noticed two large tears trickling down his cheeks. The pathetic sight of the small boy's grief at his hero's defeat helped Diana to recover, and bending down she whispered: "Don't cry, David; we'll get hold of Hugo and run down and see what's happened to Dick." Young David in his turn now felt a man, and together they rushed down the stand, dodging the onlookers, who little realised how much the accident meant to the girl, and the fact that Crusader was just beaten made her grief no less bitter.

People who had backed Firefly remarked that it was a jolly good race. Most of the spectators considered it

wretched luck on Crusader, who ought to have won, while those who had backed him protested loudly and talked of an objection.

Immediately the ring were betting on an objection, and the Stewards, including the Duke and Colonel Bryan, repaired to their room. Fortunately there was a very capable gentleman there, in addition to the two local stewards. He had had his eye on Mr. Ramp for some time past, and was now determined to mete out justice. Apparently two objections had been lodged: (1) the second against the winner for crossing at the last fence; (2) the third against the second rider for not being qualified to ride.

"Well," said the capable gentleman, addressing the other stewards, "I think our own eyes are sufficient for disqualifying the rider of the first horse. That is the important point to settle first of all. Any action with regard to the rider can be taken later, after we have interviewed all three. In the meantime, we must go into the objection to the second by the third, to see how we place the horses."

Eventually they satisfied themselves that Mr. Xenophon Postlethwaite was qualified to ride. Messrs. Weatherby's representative turned up the notice in the last *Calendar*, and as the rider had subsequently drawn the weight, Crusader, No. 9 on the card, was declared the winner.

The above decision over-ruled the second objection, though no penalty would be imposed on the owner of the second for frivolous objection. Chassepot was consequently placed second, and The Rat, two lengths ahead of Harlequin, who had been remounted, was placed third.

When the news came out, and the number 9 went up, showing that the local champion had won, tense excitement broke all bounds. He had been backed by

all the local people, and the Britisher always appreciates the plucky efforts of man and horse. The Duke, coming up to Diana, who had just seen Dick off in an ambulance in charge of the faithful Palmer, seized her by both hands and exclaimed enthusiastically, though somewhat ambiguously, "My dear child, we've got you the race all right, without partiality, favour or affection."

"Oh, I'm so glad, for Dick and Crusader's sake!" she replied with quivering lip.

"I hope Dick won't be laid up long," said Hugo, after proffering his congratulations to Diana. "A most extraordinary coincidence X. being at that last fence. He and Archie meant to have walked back to see the finish. By Jove! I'd have given anything to have done that for Dick myself."

"I know you would, Hugo," and the look of gratitude in Diana's blue eyes spoke volumes.

After the excitement of the chief race of the day, little interest was taken in the subsequent events.

Then came the usual difficulties of getting away from a country meeting. Crowds of pedestrians all over the road, vehicles going in every direction, and here and there stationary motors with their hind wheels whirring, unable to grip the slippery, churned-up mud. Frequently the drivers' efforts were accompanied by nigger minstrels singing some suitable selection from their repertoires. Some cars looked like spending all night on the course as part of the side shows, amongst others the Potts' Rolls Royce, which was pitching and rolling in the mud without making any appreciable headway.

> "Oh, Joe, the boat is going over!
> Oh, Joe, you naughty man, she cried!"

was selected to accompany the send off of Sir Joseph and his party as they slowly ploughed their way through the slush on to the road.

CHAPTER XX

MISUNDERSTANDING

It was two or three days after the great race when Hugo called at the home where Dick had been installed, but the nurse informed him that her patient could not see any more visitors that day. He was asleep now, but muttering deliriously all the time.

As Hugo stood in the passage he heard Dick's voice through an open door. "By gad! I'm glad X. was there. He's a much better fellow than I could ever be, and it's only natural that Di should choose him. Poor darling! I do hope she'll be happy."

"Good God!" exclaimed Hugo aghast, remembering that he had seen X. and Diana that morning coming out of a goldsmith's in Bond Street. He thought it rather odd at the time, as X. was never much of a lady's man. Now he understood. He was genuinely upset.

"Poor, poor old Dick!"

"Oh, they often talk nonsense like that after they've had concussion!" explained the little nurse pleasantly, noting the look of consternation in Hugo's face.

"I hope it *is* nonsense, poor old boy!"

In spite of the nurse's reassurance, Hugo, weighed down by an ominous foreboding, felt thoroughly depressed as he left the home and sauntered moodily across Belgrave Square, along Pont Street, then turned up Sloane Street, where he saw Lady Mary and "Pauper" coming out of a shop just ahead of him.

This particular shop is frequented solely by those in search of household linen of every sort and kind.

"Well, I think they are a very lucky young couple!" exclaimed old Mr. Gibson enthusiastically, as they turned and walked slowly in front of him.

Hugo, still deep in thought, pricked his ears as he followed them, dreading to inquire, lest he should hear the displeasing news definitely confirmed. He heard Lady Mary ask "Pauper," "I did tell them to put D. P. on Di's things, didn't I?"

His spirits sank to the soles of his boots. "D. P., D. P. Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Ellis," he muttered to himself. "That's done it. Diana Postlethwaite, of course. Well, I'm d——d! It's just the sort of expensive, unselfish present Lady Mary would give. Poor old Richard!" There was now no need for further inquiries. He stood still at the Knightsbridge end of Sloane Street and looked at his watch. Four o'clock, and he had intended to call on Lady Potts—in fact he had even thought, half jokingly, of again urging the adoption of a son and heir. He now felt too sick at heart to compete with the subject. Still, he'd better go and get his call over.

He was so occupied with his thoughts that he missed the opportunity of crossing into the park when the traffic was held up, and now stood gazing at the red 'buses and conglomeration of vehicles streaming east and west to and from Hyde Park Corner.

As usual, he sought consolation from the golden dreams of his imagination. His eye caught sight of a happy couple sitting with their arms round each other's waists on the top of a 'bus. Lord! how he wished they were Dick and Diana, as he watched their swaying backs at the rear of the 'bus disappearing down the Brompton Road.

At last he crossed over, and passing through the

Knightsbridge entrance into the Park, sauntered along Rotten Row towards the Potts' town house in Park Lane.

He was much too distracted to recognise anyone in the crowd, and even the blaze of colour displayed by the masses of spring flowers failed to attract his notice. He was what he called "D----d well fed up!"

Wandering on in the direction of the Marble Arch, his attention was attracted by a familiar figure calling a Sealyham terrier. Yes, it was Diana calling Dick's dog Sal. Hugo's heart beat faster, she probably saw him too; but in loyalty to Dick he had no alternative but to avoid a meeting—he'd nothing to say to her—impossible to congratulate her—best keep out of her way. So, turning his head right-handed, he followed his nose, made for the Cavalry Memorial, thence out of the Park. The weight of his depression was in no wise lightened by the uncomfortable feeling of unctuous disapprobation that he had now added to his load. If anyone had told him an hour ago that he would cut Diana Gibson, he would have said that they were mad. A dejected Hugo rang the bell at the Potts' hall door, to be ushered in by Mr. Vintage and his staff.

In the meantime there had been a flutter of excitement in the Potts' household. What was it all about?

Ever since Hugo had suggested to Lady Potts the advisability—nay, even the advantages—of adopting a son and heir, the idea had never been out of her mind. She had never ceased to badger her husband, though up to date her pleading had been in vain. However, she was not to be denied, and fortune at last favoured her importunity.

Yesterday morning Sir Joseph had actually raised the subject himself. It had seemed too good to be true, but now the long-awaited day of rejoicing had really come.

Just before Hugo's arrival, Sir Joseph and his friend 'Airy were sitting together after lunch. The latter was as debonair as ever, but his host evidently had something on his mind. There was something he wanted to say, but, for some inexplicable reason, he was not at ease, and unable to make up his mind how to begin.

There was one thing that comforted him—namely, that 'Airy had said that he was due at his club, the Albert, by tea-time, so, with any luck, he would be out of the house before Mrs. Pig, a kind-hearted but garrulous friend of their early days, was due to arrive, which might otherwise have complicated matters.

For some minutes he puffed away at his cigar with a preoccupied air, then, looking up suddenly, he attempted to explain the situation to his unemotional friend.

"Tell me, 'Airy, what would you think if I got a son. We've been—er—consid——"

"I should think," interposes 'Airy, exhibiting no apparent surprise, "what a dirty old dog you was, Joe, to 'a kept 'im in the dark all this time."

'Airy's facetiousness was both irritating and disconcerting. At any other time Sir Joseph would have passed it off good-humouredly, but not so to-day.

"I don't mean that, blast your neck!" he snaps, vainly endeavouring to dissociate his florid countenance from any expression of self-consciousness, as he feels 'Airy staring at him. "I mean it's her Ladyship's."

"'Oly Moses!" ejaculates 'Airy, with a roar of laughter. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast. I reckon you've been having a course of them monkey glands, or is it the spring air, Joe?"

Sir Joseph, determined to get it off his chest, turns round and faces his friend. "Look 'ere, give over;

stop your chaff. What I'm hendeavouring to say is this: we're thinking of adoptin' a son."

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?" 'Airy emits two large smoke rings from his indiarubber mouth. "First I thought you'd been studying them eugenics or the figure system."

"No," explains his host, feeling more at his ease now that he has broached the subject. "It's like this. Me and 'er Ladyship 'ave come to the hunanimous decision that we must 'ave a son to carry on the line; in course the title don't go on, but we feels the family should and can do." He stands up, with his coat-tails to the fire, his legs wide apart and thumbs stuck into the arm-holes of his waistcoat. "The long and short of it is, the young 'opeful is shortly coming over 'ere for our inspection. You remember young Hellis—— ?"

Before Sir Joseph has time to go into further details, Hugo is announced, and the party join Lady Potts in the drawing-room, where Hugo is warmly, almost affectionately greeted by her Ladyship.

"Don't you wait, old son, if you wants to be off," says Sir Joseph to 'Airy, dreading lest he may not be clear of the premises in good time. Fortunately, 'Airy's appointment at the Albert is pressing, and he takes his leave, at the same time button-holing Hugo, whom he manœuvres into the hall, remarking that he wants to tell him something particular before he goes.

"Well, my lad," he exclaims when they are alone, and going straight for the point, having, as he imagines, hit off the line first try. "So you're on trial, are you? Fancy being born with a silver spoon in your mouth at your time of life."

Hugo, who entirely fails to understand his meaning, smiles vacantly and asks:

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Lord bless you!" says 'Airy, with a knowing

wink. "Don't you know? They're d——n well going to adopt you, lock, stock and barrel. You're no longer nobody's child. You're for it. Afore you know where you are you'll have your tonsils cut, your appendix out, and very likely——"

"You know more about it than I do," chips in Hugo, aghast at the idea.

"I've no doubt I do. They've been asking my advice. I wants to congratulate you. It's been me whose been your friend." 'Airy, with an eye to the main chance, realises that it is as well to keep in with the heir apparent. "Well, I wish you good luck, my son, and don't forget me, as did all the spade work for you. I guess you ought'er join mother at tea now. Well, cheerio!" He crams his low-brimmed billycock hat on his head, pinches an umbrella out of the hall, and leaves the house.

Poor Hugo is absolutely dumbfounded; for once in his life he is thoroughly embarrassed, and wishes he had never mentioned the d——d subject so casually to Lady Potts. He decides before returning to the drawing-room to have a whisky-and-soda and a cigarette in the smoking-room, and there meditate quietly over his future. Damn it! it's a bit too thick, too much of a good thing altogether. 'Airy must be wrong. No, I remember now Lady P. was extraordinarily gushing, she was all over me. You could knock me over with a feather. Nerve's completely gone. What am I going to call myself? Who am I? What am I? Feel like Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Well, not exactly that, but it's a devilish awkward show——"

He gulps down a large whisky-and-soda to steady his nerves. Of course I can back out of it. Know I could never stick it. The question is, can I afford to refuse what the gods offer? Well, one needn't decide immediately; after all, there are two parties to

a contract like this—and, feeling that sooner or later he must stand his trial, he returns to the drawing-room.

Sir Joseph, who never takes tea, has retired to his sanctum sanctorum.

As Hugo enters, Lady Potts exclaims rapturously, "Oh, Mr. Ellis, I'm so glad you've come!" Hugo clears his throat in an endeavour to speak, but no words are forthcoming, and he stands there like some unfortunate animal hypnotised by a snake. "I've something very purtic'ler to ask of you." He feels himself swallowing the protests that his brain conjures up but his tongue refuses to utter, and he can only gulp like a fish out of water. He might be standing out in no man's land, knowing that Lady Potts has a trench mortar trained on him from behind her parapet of cakes, sandwiches and a large tea-cosy. Yes, here it comes, aimed straight at him. "I'm going to ask you," her Ladyship proceeds to explain; but Hugo, seeing no means of escape, is determined to sell his life dearly, and hurriedly protests. "No, no, I'm really not worthy of the honour."

Lady Potts is flattered by this show of modesty. "Why, you're the very first person Sir Joseph and I chose. It seemed so natural we should turn to you."

"Oh, I thoroughly appreciate the honour, but——" gasps Hugo, beads of perspiration breaking out on his forehead.

"Dear Mr. Ellis, there isn't no buts. Sir Joseph wouldn't hear of a refusal. You're too modest, indeed you are."

"Lady Potts, I beg of you," pleads Hugo, wracking his brain for some cogent excuse.

"But we both want you," continues Lady Potts, beaming all over, "to be godfather to our little son, who we've adopted. He's just arrived. You must

come and look at the little cherub. We're going to call him Plantagenet."

Probably due to reaction, poor Hugo now breaks out into a cold sweat, but manages to pull himself together.

"Delighted, dear Lady Potts, I assure you! Nothing in the world would give me more pleasure," he replies with genuine sincerity, heaving a sigh of relief. He then notices, for the first time, a stout lady sitting near the fire in nurse's uniform, and against whose ample lap leans the infant Plantagenet.

Hugo advances and scrutinises his godson, and the stout person asks him whether he doesn't think he's a beautiful child.

It is on the tip of his tongue to say that he fancies he sees a likeness to someone, but fortunately refrains from any such comment, merely remarking that he hopes he'll have a good leg for a boot.

"We're taking him home to Kingsmede to-morrow; aren't we, dearie?" says her Ladyship, ogling her newly-adopted son like a comfortable old hen who has hatched out a pheasant's egg and imagines no one notices anything peculiar about the chick.

After sitting through tea and baby talk for half an hour, Hugo ventures to inquire whether Lady Potts has heard about Diana's engagement.

"No, not a word. Do tell me! Such a sweet girl! Joe always admired her so."

"You know Mr. Postlethwaite," says Hugo lamely.

Lady Potts clasps her hands ecstatically. "Well, I never! 'O'd have thought it? I never should have guessed it in a month of Sundays."

"Well, perhaps I oughtn't to have mentioned it until the engagement's made public." He wonders whether he could have possibly made a mistake. No,

quite impossible. Dick said so himself, and the initials D. P. merely confirmed it.

"Oh, I won't say a word!" Lady Potts assures him, having every intention of broadcasting this interesting piece of news at the first opportunity. Like all other busybodies, the fact of knowing a secret before other people thoroughly appealed to her.

Eventually Hugo bids them good-bye, and is forced to embrace his godson, who retaliates with a wet, slobbery kiss.

"Well, thank God I haven't disinherited the little brat!" he thinks to himself. "Poor little beggar! I wonder what on earth 'Airy had got into his head. Got hold of the wrong end of the stick, at any rate."

Ten minutes later, walking down Piccadilly to his club, who should he run into but X., who pulled him up short.

"Well, Hugo, how goes it?"

"You are a lucky chap!" remarks the other, disregarding the question and rather half-hearted in his congratulations.

"Yes, wasn't it lucky coming in for that ride on my old horse? I went to Crichton's this morning to get a model of him made for the Phennells."

"The Phennells!" exclaims Hugo, aghast.

"Yes, Dick and Diana. They'll both be Phennell soon."

"Good God, of course. D. P., D. P. What a d——d fool I am!" he says half aloud to himself. "I forgot Phennell wasn't spelt with an F. Yes, of course, of course," he repeats aloud.

Though X. is apparently mystified by the ramifications of Hugo's brain, he is too incurious to try and probe any deeper, and they stroll arm in arm into the latter's club to drink the health of the happy couple.

Before going back to his rooms in Jermyn Street, Hugo hurriedly called up Lady Potts on the telephone.

"Oh, I say, Lady Potts," he exclaimed, "that's off, Miss Gibson's engagement."

"Off, Mr. Ellis! You don't say so. Dear me! Dear me! I was only saying, I mean I was only thinking, what a perfect match it was."

"Er, I mean it's a mistake. It was never on. It was just a rumour, don't you know. However, there's no harm done, as you haven't told anyone, and I haven't said a word to a soul."

"Oh, no!" she replied in agitated tones. "Oh, no! Indeed I wouldn't mention it for worlds."

"That's all right then, Lady Potts. Good-bye."

As a matter of fact her Ladyship had just informed Kitten Whiting of the happy event—of course in the strictest confidence—and, as is usually the case, they had gone on to discuss the respective incomes and ages of the engaged couple.

Undoubtedly Kitten is sure to have told her husband, the Admiral, in strict confidence; goodness only knows how far it will have got by now.

But hearing screams from Plantagenet, who is stubbornly resisting the efforts of his new nurse to bath him, Lady Potts bustles up to the nursery, and soon dismisses all thoughts of the delusive engagement from her mind. She never knew she could run so fast; evidently the maternal instinct had brought back the activity of her youth. What a happy woman she was!

The series of incidents that culminated in the blissful event were somewhat as follows.

Only yesterday morning Sir Joseph was looking through his letters at breakfast, and had incidentally scanned the pages of his pass-book, sent to him at the end of every month. Running his fat forefinger down

the left-hand pages in the Dr. column, he noted, amongst other items, the regular monthly payments to H. Bloomfield.

It being no affair of his wife's, he put the book, as was his usual custom, in his coat pocket.

Then he opened a black-edged envelope, extracted a similarly black-edged letter, read the contents twice, put it back in the envelope and thrust it also into his pocket.

This last letter, from Mrs. Pig, formerly Polly Perkins, was to the effect that her dear friend Hazel Bloomfield had just died—was took ill all of a sudden. Of course Sir Joseph would remember Hazel, seeing as how she had introduced them several years ago. Poor Hazel had left a small child, such a sweet boy. Just before her sad death, Hazel had disclosed her secret, and the long and short of it was, Mr. Pig had told her something's got to be done about it. The little pet was, for the time being, with Polly, but that, of course, was only a temporary arrangement, and she now asked Sir Joseph to come and see her at No. 9, Brick Street, Balham, to see what could be done.

Sir Joseph retired to his study engrossed in thought. As Lady Potts had once remarked, there was a skeleton in every cupboard, but this particular one was a chubby, well-nourished specimen.

Being a man of action, Sir Joseph determined to waste no time, and that same morning found him emerging from a taxi at No. 9, Brick Street, Balham.

He rang the bell, and as the door was opened a strong smell of cooking and infantile chatter issued from the interior. Mrs. Pig was at home, though engaged in household duties and not yet dressed to receive callers.

Sir Joseph's first impression was, "My, how Polly's changed since she turned respectable!" The house

was full of small Pigs, a regular litter grinning at him through the banisters of the linoleum-covered staircase, and from his hostess's appearance the supply was to be still further augmented very shortly.

"How are you, my dear Polly?" he exclaimed, taking her plump hand in his.

"Nicely, thank you, Joe. Sir Joseph, I should say. I felt sure you'd come, though I didn't expect you as early," replied the good lady. "Come in and sit down, and tell me what you think's the best thing to do."

Sir Joseph was hardly prepared for such a direct question, but sat down on a plush-covered chair, while his hostess disposed herself on a wicker contrivance, that scarcely looked up to her weight, immediately opposite him.

While awaiting his reply, she endeavoured to arrange her *robe de maternité* as becomingly as possible, and Sir Joseph could not help noticing that, in spite of her generative propensities, she still retained a very neat ankle.

"Poor 'Azel!" he began, assuming a becoming air of sympathetic despondency. "It came as a great shock to me. I'd no idea she'd been hailing."

"No, poor soul! She was took all of a sudden," explained Mrs. Pig, looking mournfully down at the well-worn hearthrug at her feet. "But he's such a sweet tot. You must see him."

"No, no! Don't let's disturb the little beggar now."

"You can't miss the likeness," observes Polly.

"Ah, to his mother! Yes, I'm sure he does. Poor 'Azel!"

"No, not his mother."

"Humph!" grunts her guest, wriggling uncomfortably in his chair.

"Of course, I know how handsome she'd always been treated: payments regular every month. But what's to happen now?" asks Polly, shrugging her shoulders in despair.

Sir Joseph stares at the pink-paper shavings that take the place of a fire in the grate. But their snaky tortuosity seems even further to muddle his brain, when he is trying hard to find a way out of the entanglement, and wishing to goodness Polly would make some reasonable suggestion herself, instead of bluntly demanding solutions to the very delicate problem.

"Wonder what sort of chap Pig is," he thinks to himself. "Ain't a Stopeian, anyway."

He sits up in his chair, rubbing his knees backwards and forwards with the palms of his hands.

"Tell me, what's your family consist of now, Polly?" he asks, trying to remember how many brats he had encountered on the staircase when he came in.

"We've four at present, but one never knows," she replies guardedly.

Sir Joseph mentally calculates; four and one, five, and one more, that's six—nice even number.

"Well, in course, the payments'll go on as regular as ever. I was thinking perhaps," he suggests, watching to see how Polly will receive his suggestion, "you might like to keep the lad 'ere. One more or less can't make no difference."

"No, Joe, no, that won't never do," she asserts firmly. "Mr. Pig isn't one for feeding other chicks. No, we can't undertake a poor little cuckoo in the nest, that's quite certain."

"But I'd make it worth your while, my dear."

"I've no doubt you would, but Pig'd never have it, nor me neither."

"You always was durned independent, Polly. And o' course I don't know Mr. Pig; not 'ad the pleasure

o' 'is 'quaintance. But, from all appearances, I gather 'e's a man what's fond o' children," remarks Sir Joseph, in his most diplomatic tones.

"No, I tell you it's no good," replies Mrs. Pig, reinforcing her words by deliberately shaking her head from side to side.

"But, mind you, there's this to consider. Best rear children in couples, and six would make a nice heven number," he argues.

"I don't understand, you don't mean to suggest," stammers Polly, misunderstanding his allusion.

"Pardon. No offence meant, I assure you. I only thought perhaps, Mr. Pig being fond of children and 'aving a young wife, one never knows, don't you know. Large families coming into fashion again, and so on."

"No, once and for all, no. I must tell you, Pig's not a man to be trifled with. He says to me this morning as he went to his work, 'Polly,' he says, 'the child can't stop here. If you can't settle things, I shall do it myself. You understand me?' When Pig says that I know he means it." But her guest still persists.

"In course, it isn't as though he was a big child. I don't suppose 'e stands so 'igh." Sir Joseph holds his hand out level with his knee. "I don't believe you'd realise 'e was in the 'ouse, a little chap like that. I don't really."

Potts' domestic ignorance exasperates Polly.

"Good gracious, you don't suppose he's a dwarf; besides, the child'll grow."

"Ah, there you're wrong!" explains Sir Joseph. "I never growed till I was eighteen. Just a little chap. Just so." He again demonstrates the required dimensions by holding a fat hand palm downwards level with his knee.

"Well, anyway, Pig won't have it," concludes Polly, and Sir Joseph realises that the gentleman in question is evidently not a man to be trifled with.

Baffled in his first attempt, he remains silent, turning the problem over in his mind.

After a few moments' deep meditation, he apparently sees a possible solution. He calls to mind her Ladyship's persistent request for an adopted son. The question is, How can it be arranged? Why shouldn't he kill two birds with one stone? It seems that the sins of the father might be visited on the wife, so to speak.

"He's a proper little gent by birth," observes Polly intriguingly. "It isn't as if one didn't know all about his antecedents. Besides, poor Hazel's father, old Mr. Bloomfield, was an army officer, or was he in the Church? I know it was one or t'other."

Sir Joseph's fist comes down on the table. "Damme, I'll adopt the little blighter! After all, many h'ancestors of our great h'aristocracy come the wrong side of the blanket. 'Istory repeats itself. There was talk about Sir Raymond De la Pourt."

"Joe, you're a brick!" she exclaims, breaking into the familiarity of earlier days.

"But," he adds, holding up a forefinger, "it must be done circumspectly, mark you. We could put a had in *The Times*—'Andsome orphan boy to be adopted. No dealers to apply,' or something o' that sort. 'Intending adopters to apply to box so and so, *The Times*.'"

"I understand, Joe." And kindly Mrs. Pig begins to snuffle, holding her handkerchief to her nose, her feelings evidently being too much for her.

"I don't see why we shouldn't 'ave it in the paper to-morrow, and I'll wire for first refusal," concludes the matter-of-fact prospective parent, in his businesslike way.

The final details were arranged over a bottle of Bass, followed by a second one, and although Sir Joseph took his departure without disturbing the future heir to the Potts estates, Polly knew that she had succeeded in her mission, and was quite prepared to bring the child over to Park Lane herself.

Before they parted they were both on the best of terms, and Sir Joseph, feeling that he had made some atonement for the past, was in excellent spirits. They began to discuss their friends of the old Amphibius days. Had Joe heard how Lydia Lipsalve was getting on with the stuttering Lord Wimper?—Did he know that Gracie Hopper now gave dancing lessons and styled herself Madame De la Punèse?—Did Polly remember the time she ran 'er 'at-pin into him? It was Derby night, and they'd all been to Epsom on the coach, and 'ad supper at the "Star and Garter."—The remembrance almost brought a blush to her plump, domesticated cheek. What 'ad come of little Robin 'Ardup, as used to stand on 'is 'ead and play the Swannee Whistle?—The last she heard of him he was serving in a cocktail bar in Frisco.—Did Polly know what became of them two sisters what-d'yer-my-callems?—Oh, he must mean the two twins Sissy and Susie! Why, they married the same Frenchman. At least one did, but he never knew which it was. They both had moles on their backs, and were as like as two peas.—Of course he'd heard that Tubby Knowall forged an uncle's signature and did time. Such a nice simple chap he always seemed, too.—Then you remember Baby Townley that poor Cuddy Fletcher was so sweet on, ran off with a Turk. Poor Cuddy then took to politics, and afterwards to drink.—Wasn't it terrible Algy Boothook breaking his neck racing? And where was old Hairy these days?—What a cheery lot of souls they were! Those were the good old days. But

Polly assured Sir Joseph she wouldn't go back to them, now she'd got a home of her own, and all the kids, too. Besides, there wasn't a better husband anywhere than her Pig. "Nor a better wife, I make no doubt," asserts Sir Joseph gallantly.

By the time that they had been through the entire roll of their acquaintances it was time for Sir Joseph to leave, if he was going to call at *The Times* offices before lunch, and Mrs. Pig, who in the meantime had left the cares of the household to the half-witted maid, was feeling anxious, as the smell of burning milk was slowly but surely permeating through the house.

With repeated assurances that he would fix up everything on his side while Polly was to make inquiries about a nurse, Sir Joseph eventually departed.

Later, Mrs. Pig was able to explain to her husband that a rich relation of Hazel's was going to take the little angel, and the worthy man made no further inquiries, kissing his wife and saying, "That's a good girl, Polly. I knew you'd fix something!"

According to plan, the following advertisement appeared in *The Times* on the following morning: "Would any kind person care to adopt a four-year-old orphan boy of good family? Those interested should apply to Box 1927, *The Times*."

Sir Joseph and Lady Potts were seated at breakfast.

"'Ullo, what's this, Mother?" observes her spouse, with an air of studied disinterestedness. "Look 'ere! I never knew it before, but apparently you can get a kid for the asking of it any day."

He hands her the paper, and the good lady reads the announcement with fluttering heart and heaving bosom.

"Oh, Joseph, if only——" she murmurs, further utterance being choked by the depth of her emotions.

"Well"—(a benign expression creeps over his gross countenance, as he thinks to himself, "The 'ole thing's

as heasy as fallin' off a log ")—" as your 'eart seems so set on it, I'll wire for first refusal, and ask to 'ave the nipper sent along 'ere this afternoon for us to see."

Poor Lady Potts was so overcome by her husband's indulgent concession to what he had always before alluded to as her freakish whim that she could scarcely speak.

"I shall always think of him as if he really was your child, dearie. And let's rechristen him Plantagenet seeing as that's a family name. I've a good mind to ask that nice Mr. Ellis to act as sponsor."

Throughout the day she was so elated that even the presence of 'Airy at luncheon had not been the usual thorn in her side. She was in this happy frame of mind when Hugo had called the same afternoon.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST DAY OF THE SEASON

We feel sure that our readers will be glad to leave the sordid atmosphere of the last chapter and the grimy smoke of London, where, though we paint our houses one week, we find them dirtier than ever the next. London is a strange medley of drab dinginess and garish display, especially at night, with here and there hidden treasures only known to a few. Yet most of us have a soft place in our hearts for the old city. We remember the treats of our childhood: Madame Tussaud's, the Tower of London, Sundays at the Zoo, fine mornings in Kensington Gardens, and our nurse's loyal admiration for that monstrosity, the Albert Memorial. Later on, an exciting match at Lords, and perhaps some youthful romance at a ball towards the end of the season; very possibly, in still more recent years, some rattling good games of polo and dinners with cheery friends.

All happy memories, but most of us, who were born and bred on the land, will always have a deep-rooted longing for the country.

Now it so happens that the Rushworth hounds usually kill a May fox in the down and woodland end of their country, and to-day would have been May 1, if capricious February had not boasted twenty-nine days this year, so that the last fixture of the season falls upon April 30.

It is just ten days since the great race, and Dick is back at Rushworth, though he is still unable to ride.

The happy couple decide that they cannot possibly miss the last day of the season, and there is obviously only one thing to do. Ten miles to the meet is nothing, so Diana will take her now convalescent Dick in the tub-cart behind the staunch pony Tommy. What could be better than a whole day to themselves—and such a glorious day too? Besides, as a great treat, X., who is staying with Archie Languid, has been promised a mount on Crusader, who is as fresh as paint and never showed any ill effects from his race.

The meet is at Burford Gate, in the centre of the big woods bordering the downs. We saw a glimpse of them once, on a fine November morning, looking out from Sir Joseph's dressing-room window across the well-kept lawn, with its stately cedars and over the valley of the Nene beyond. Burford is a derelict half built mansion, planned by an eccentric gentleman, whose one hobby in life was building gigantic houses, and long before he completed this, his last work, he became bankrupt, leaving the enormous stone edifice unfinished, to become in course of years a ruined pile in the heart of the wood.

Miss Sally Bindle.

The happy pair start off at a quarter to eleven, as the meet is not till midday, and the roads are good, except for the last zig-zag climb up Burford Hill.

Sal, or Miss Sal Bindle as she should be addressed in full, has the honour of accompanying them, and, of course, is an admirable chaperon. She can almost talk, but not quite, and being a lady untroubled with nerves, she feels no qualms as Tommy cuts the corners at twelve miles an hour, Diana steering him as best she

can with one hand, as Dick has sole possession of the other.

To-day the whole country looks so fresh and green in the bright sunshine, and slowly traversing the blue sky above are little white clouds clustered together, like flocks of sheep roaming the downs.

Sal hears the birds singing in the hedgerows, the pigeons cooing in the woods, and rejoices in the comfortable feeling of the warm sun on her back. Of course she has to snarl at stray dogs they pass on the road, as she sits up on her hind legs, gazing over the side of the cart and sniffing the balmy spring air. On the whole she considers that it is a most attractive way of spending a fine day, and the smell of luncheon in the basket, that Diana considered necessary for the occasion, is most comforting.

On arrival at the rendezvous, the party is besieged by numerous friends and acquaintances, all eager to offer their warmest congratulations. In spite of the London season, half the countryside has turned up to-day, and hounds have already arrived. They have not quite that same keen and alert expression which characterised their appearance when last we saw them out. There is just a suspicion of inertness, as though they realise, from the warmth of the midday sun, that hunting is near its close, and to-day they are content to squat passively on the grass around the heels of Welch's horse.

Colonel Brian comes up to congratulate Dick and Diana, remarking that he is delighted to see Dick out again, though he would have preferred to have seen them both on four legs. They tell him that they couldn't miss the opportunity of seeing hounds out for the last time this season, even if it entailed pursuing on wheels.

The Duke pats Dick on the back, and chaffingly

congratulates Diana on pulling off a double event, while Sir Joseph, oozing with *bonhomie*, and wishing to couple his compliments with the ducal congratulations, 'Opes they'll be as 'appy as they deserves. "But," he adds with a wink, "I got a son afore you now," alluding to the young Plantagenet, and drawing a laugh from Dick and a charming blush from Diana, as the former pinches her, fortunately both having heard the full details of Hugo's ordeal on the day of Plantagenet's adoption.

Mathilde now sidles up to the cart and proffers her sincerest felicitations, saying that she suspected it since a long time, and adding romantically, that one can always read love in a man's eyes, and Dick's are so expressive. It is Dick's turn to blush now, and Diana retaliates with a prod in his ribs with the end of her whip, unobserved by Mathilde.

The next is Archie Languid, who is convinced that they will be the exception that proves the rule, evidently believing that his own experiences were the normal.

Little Devinia Bulkely is delighted, and cannot imagine two people better suited to each other. This nice little person has hopes that the attractive but elusive Spurrier may soon follow Dick's example.

Old Mr. Barnaby pulls up his gig alongside the cart, and taking off his hat, trusts that they will accept the congratulations and blessings of one of the oldest Rushworth tenants. All the country was so pleased about it, and at a meeting of the Watcombe Board of Guardians last Saturday they "never talked of nothing else, coming right a' top of the race as it did."

No sooner had he finished when up come "the big three," back for their Easter holidays. By Jove, they're jolly glad they're really going to get married, and Mother sent her best love and congratulations through Peter and David. Johnnie announces that

it's the best thing he's heard for years—in fact he couldn't imagine a better match. No doubt he had heard the happy event being discussed by his parents, and felt that he could not do better than express similar views.

"Now tell me your news. Did you get a prize last term, David?" inquires Diana of her favourite, who smiles, thinking she perhaps knows more than she pretends.

"No, I was bottom in my new form, but I worked as hard as I could, and no man on earth can do more than that," declares the thirteen-year-old brat.

The next to arrive are an ill-assorted couple, old Pull-it-down, lean, lank and liverish, and Ariadne Wigmore, pink, plump and protruding, in what Dick describes as good show condition. The former trusts that they will be spared the too frequent vexations usually inseparable from matrimony, and only taste the joys of married life, while Ariadne gushingly declares that the thought of their engagement simply thrills her. She dreamt of them all last night; love is such a wonderful thing when one is young and romantic. The cheery smile on Billy Lines' face can now be seen miles away, and coming up, he persists in shaking both their hands, giving them his blessing, and predicting that long life and happiness shall be their due, as he never knew two people so absolutely cut out for each other. These and many more were the congratulations received by the young couple.

The next to arrive on the scene is Hugo, who, though he has already proffered his heartfelt appreciation of the engagement, tells Diana, "I've got a confession to make. I actually nerved myself up to cutting you in the Park the other day, and I've felt like that chap in the *Pilgrim's Progress* with a load on his back ever since." He then proceeded to explain his doubts and

misapprehensions on that eventful afternoon, but, far from being annoyed, Diana declares that she really likes him all the better for his loyalty to Dick. While he is talking to them, who should appear but the Admiral, trudging along beside X. on Crusader? Apparently he is congratulating X. in his breezy nautical way, who, on his part, appears to be quite dumbfounded. The old sailor, now turning to Diana, exclaims at the top of his voice, "This is luck! I'm so pleased, Ma, to have the opportunity of congratulating you both! Lucky young couple, ain't they?" turning to Dick, and indicating the recipients of his good wishes with a wave of his hand. "Kitten told me all about Mr. Postlethwaite before I left London. D——d lucky fellow, I call him!"

Hugo endeavours to come to the rescue. "It's not Mr. Postlethwaite," he bellows into the Admiral's ear.

"Beg pardon, Ma, my mistake. Mr. Thostlepaite, I mean."

"No, she's not engaged to Mr. Thostlepaite either," roars Hugo, feeling that the onus of clearing up the situation rests with him.

"Ah, well," observes the Admiral consolingly, "there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," and attempting, in his confusion, to smooth over the *faux pas* with a mixed metaphor, "After all, what's one man's meat's another man's poison."

Dick screams with laughter, "She's my poison, Admiral."

"I almost think I prefer that to being called your meat," whispers Diana, with a twinkle in her eye.

Hugo makes a final effort, requesting Dick and Diana each to put their hand in his; then, turning to the Admiral, he solemnly proclaims at the top of his voice, "This is the engaged couple, Admiral, and if

ye know just cause or impediment why these two should not be joined together in holy matrimony ye are to declare it."

The unfortunate pair, covered with confusion at having the attention of the whole countryside so brutally drawn upon them, snatch their hands away as the old Admiral exclaims devoutly, " So help me God."

Dick seizes the whip from his cousin and threatens to chastise the *enfant terrible*, Hugo, while Diana, anxious to change the subject, turns to X. and holds out a hand to caress Crusader's soft muzzle. " I do hope you'll get a hunt on my precious."

" D'you know," he replies, giving the horse a resounding pat on his muscular neck, " I'm perfectly happy just hacking him about on this lovely day. It's most awfully good of you giving me a ride on him, Miss Gibson, and I'm tremendously honoured."

Hounds now come jogging down the road, and Welch, raising his cap, hopes he may offer his congratulations. Both cordially thank him, and Diana turns the cart round to follow after the horsemen bumping behind the pack.

Burford Wood is a long wood, crowded with oaks of various ages, running parallel to the Watcombe–Bickhampton road for over a mile, and close on three-quarters of a mile in width, with the open, rolling downs on the far side, and bounded at one end by the main railway line, with an extensive wild heath at the other. In spite of the time of year, the rides are still heavy, owing to recent rain and timber hauling in the wood. On all sides the ground is carpeted with white anemones, primroses and wood violets.

Welch draws away from the main line.

Soon there is a fox afoot, but hounds are unable to make anything of it. Most probably it is a vixen above ground, and kindly Nature has rendered her

almost immune from the danger of being scented by her bloodthirsty foes.

The field are assembled at a boggy cross ride in the middle of the wood; the horses, impatiently stamping, bespatter themselves and their riders with mud. Ariadne is lolling back in her saddle, her double chin resting on the end of her whip and staring vacantly at her horse's ears, with the reins hanging loosely on his neck. She is in a romantic mood, and had been discussing the recent engagement with her neighbour, who remarked, "Well, I suppose it's true that Spring's the time when young men's fancies lightly turn to thoughts of love——"

"Ah, Springtime," she replies, as her horse starts pawing the ground with his forefoot. "What subtle charm it has! I always think it brings us nearer to Nature, nearer to the mysteries of mother earth." Suddenly, without any further warning, the old roan flops down on his knees. Frantic shrieks from Ariadne, which distract hounds, have no effect on the horse, who solemnly lies down with a grunt of satisfaction and proceeds to roll. Next moment both are wallowing on their backs in the mud, like two frolicksome puppies asking to have their tummies scratched.

However, except for her dignity, Ariadne is unhurt, and the shameless old horse having satisfied his long-felt want, and now covered with mud, gets up again as solemnly as he had reclined.

"Hope you're not hurt, Mrs. Wigmore"—"By Jove, how annoying!"—"Tiresome horse!"—"Here, have my second horseman's saddle"—"Worse than Flander's mud"—"Quite spoilt your nice coat"—"Let me help you"—"Woa, horse!"—"Mind he doesn't do it again"—exclaim a dozen voices, as the old rascal once more resumes his work of excavation. Eventually a good-natured farmer manages to clean the

worst of the mud off the saddle, and with a well-timed push returns the unfortunate lady on to her horse.

Condolences and mirth had barely subsided, when a fresh fox is seen crossing one of the rides and heading for the far corner of the wood towards the heath; thus the incident is temporarily forgotten in the excitement of the moment.

Welch's cheery voice puts hounds on the line, and their cry now appears to indicate that this, at any rate, is a dog-fox. Some of the field charge through the wood after hounds, as no ride leads in the right quarter, but Sir Joseph, Pull-it-down and old Wortlebury stick to the safer course, in hopes of striking a convenient track that will take them in the right direction.

They pound up the main ride, squelching up the mud with their horses' feet, but hounds, bearing left-handed, are not only out of sight, but soon are out of hearing.

Three great minds think alike—"Best pull up and listen." "Hark holloa!" exclaims Sir William. "Woa, blast you!" ejaculates Sir Joseph, jerking at the reins as his horse starts to fidget. A series of shrill cries ahead: "'Ullo, what's that? A 'olloa!" The yells continue unabated. "Yes, I bet that's a 'olloa all right," Potts assures his companions, then, setting spurs to his horse and sousing himself down in the saddle, he gallops off in the direction that the noise comes from. "No doubt of it," he says to himself as the penetrating screams get louder and louder. Puffing and blowing, he draws rein at a farmhouse on the edge of the wood. What a commotion! What on earth can it be? Heated and agitated, Sir Joseph looks over the door of the farmyard whence the noise originated. He's "d——d if it isn't that bottle-nosed old fool Marrow-

fat killing pigs for the Millchester bacon factory." The picture reminds one of Ralph Caldecott's three jolly huntsmen,

They hunted and they holload but nothing could they find,
Except a pig being caught and killed, and they that left behind.
One said, " It's just a pig being killed," the other he said " Nay,
It's Marrowfat's old Middlewhite that's led us all astray. Look 'ee there ! "

However, our three sportsmen are now relieved to catch a note of the horn back in the wood, so they turn and retrace their steps, each inwardly abusing the other.

Suddenly hounds can be heard on their right, hunting in the rough heath beyond the wood, and deciding that their only chance is to make for that direction, they, too, plunge into the maze of trees, Potts guarding his own face with one arm held out in front, to catch the low branches, which he lets swish back into Sir William's ruby-vintage, nurtured face.

Now there is a clearing ahead, but, as luck would have it, a low bank with a staked fence on top still separates them from the rest of the field. In an instant, Pull-it-down is off his horse, which proceeds to graze leisurely, while his master gets to work on the fence, heaving up stakes and energetically clearing a passage for himself and his companions.

" That'll do ! Let's 'ave a go at it," shouts Potts, putting the unreliable, faint-hearted Pearl Finder at the gap, but though he can normally be counted on jumping with a lead, he is as likely as not to refuse when asked to leap first.

There is really nothing left of the fence, yet he puts his ears back with an evil expression and stubbornly sticks his toes in the ground. Whack ! Whack !

Whack! "Curse the brute! 'Ere, you 'ave a go, Wortlebury, this —— —— unreliable —— ——'s off colour to-day," the last whack from Potts' whip producing a vicious kick from the horse.

Sir William now walks solemnly up to the fence, encouraging his mount with a "Come on, old man! Hold up now! Hold up!" But the old dobbin merely stands facing the wretched gap: to all intents Sir William's spurs in his flanks make no impression, and even the note of hounds, that can now be heard, fails to put heart into him; nor are Sir Joseph's exhortations, "Gurr on! Hup! Hup" of any more avail.

Sir Joseph is frantic, and knowing that his only chance is to get a lead, he proceeds violently to flick Sir William's horse from behind. "Now then, 'old tight!" he shouts encouragingly. But the advice intended for the rider is taken literally by his mount. The second well-aimed flick curls the lash of the whip securely round the horse's tail, and, to make matters worse, the brute tucks in his tail with Potts' thong held fast round it, the end of the tail disappearing between his hind legs.

Suddenly he gives a bound forward, Sir William is thrown back, and Potts, clinging tight to the whip, is pulled forward with a jerk. One turns a back somersault and the other executes a graceful headlong dive, both landing together athwart the bank, with their horses on opposite sides. Their ponderous struggles midst snorts and gasps remind Pull-it-down of some desperate steer-wrestling contests he had once witnessed. Possibly due to the fact that both sportsmen are winded, there is a notable absence of apologies, then, sad to relate, mutual recriminations ensue, and are only brought to an end by the despised Pull-it-down leading first Sir Joseph's and then his own horse over the gap. Potts

and Wortlebury continue to abuse each other, each in turn confiding to Pull-it-down, what a da——d fool the other is. "Hungrateful, henterpriseless blighter hacting the fool like that. Never seen such a chap," asserts Potts heatedly.

"Noisy, vulgar, profiteering bounder!" reiterates Wortlebury.

To both of which sentiments Pull-it-down tacitly agrees.

"The sport o' kings, the image o' war," the latter thinks to himself—and, thank goodness, as far as he is concerned, only one per cent. of its dangers.

The two welterweights, still spluttering with rage, laboriously remount, in their agitation each getting on to the other's horse and proceeding to give their respective mounts a good rib roasting.

Potts looks up, and seeing Sir William lambasting his champion show hunter, exclaims, "'Ere, dammit, you're beating my 'orse!"

"Well, blast it, you're beating mine!" retorts Sir William, also realising the situation, and we are glad to say that both had a sufficient sense of humour to laugh and make friends, wondering, in their own minds, how far that dry old stick Pull-it-down was responsible for the joke.

In the meantime Welch has lost his fox; in spite of his efforts he has failed on the now thoroughly-foiled ground to regain contact with his quarry, and hounds, with their heads up, are scattered amongst the tufts of heather. A long-drawn-out blast on the horn collects them, and the huntsman turns his horse's head for the road.

Fred's "Coup Covert! Coup Covert! Couic!" brings in another couple, and old Sempstress, with a tell-tale bit of rabbit fluff in her mouth, comes near to

feeling the raw hide of a thong on her rump. Fred then tells the hounds over again and reports to Welch, "They're all up now."

Dick and Diana were considering the question of lunch, but seeing hounds coming their way, they postponed the event. Nevertheless, thirsty sportsmen passing the cart accept their offer of a drink, and each in turn toast the happy couple.

While Colonel Brian and his huntsman are considering where to draw next, a young farmer informs them where there is most days an old dog fox up a tree, and more than likely he'll be there to-day.

The prospect of a hunt over the downs appeals to the Master after the last three unprofitable hours spent in the big wood, and bidding Fred, the first whip, ride on with the farmer, with instructions to give the varmint a chance after his jump for safety, he jogs along a cart track with Welch and the pack to select a good position to hold up hounds, while the field follow in rear. Close at their heels come Tommy and the cart, and once out of the enclosures on to the open downs, it is as much as Diana can do to restrain him from continually breaking into a canter. When he does, poor Sal, with a pathetic look on her face, slides backwards and forwards on her seat, like an unfortunate passenger on a rolling liner before he has got his sea legs.

Eventually they pull up where the field are assembled, all gazing at the operations now being conducted by the farmer and Fred. Both their horses are standing at the foot of an old oak tree on the edge of a small spinney, and in one stalwart arm, thickly covered with ivy, it is hoped that Reynard, like Charles II, may be found reposing after his nocturnal adventures.

More often than not, a fox found sleeping in a tree after a heavy meal on the previous night makes but a

poor bid for life, but our friend on this occasion had fared badly after an unsuccessful marauding night, and when he curled up in his bower of ivy leaves the pangs of hunger were still unappeased.

The betrayer of his stronghold now leans down with both hands resting on the trunk of the tree. Fred climbs up and stands on his shoulders, from which positions he is able to reach with the lash of his whip half-way down the ivy-clad branch where the fox is crouching. With the first dexterous flick he cuts through some of the young ivy leaves, and with the second onslaught the fox gets up and jumps through fifteen feet of air on to the ground below. He gives himself a hurried shake, and off he strides, with a whisk of his brush, across the wide stretch of down.

"Let 'em go now," bids Colonel Brian, nodding to his huntsman. The gate is pushed open and Welch canters over the grass, whistling to his hounds to follow him; he eases up short of the line, facing in the same direction that he last saw the fox pointing for. Hounds cast ahead. A low-toned, prolonged holloa from the huntsman floats back on the breeze as they pick up the scent and drive on down the hill with a fine cry.

"Forrard, forrard, forrard together!" cries Welch, standing up in his stirrups and getting hold of his horse as they gallop down the slope. What a hustle and bustle amongst the field, cramming on of hats, and snatching of bridles as they charge through the gate and over the old downland turf! The two occupants of the cart wish they too could be there, as they see hounds now streaming away up the opposite side of the valley, with the huntsman in close attendance. Diana catches a last glimpse of Crusader sailing away with no signs of fluster—in fact, X. is only holding his

reins in one hand, and pointing with his whip in the other at some object ahead.

As Crusader strides over the grass, X. remembers the fine hunt they had together more than a year ago. He recalls something he said to himself at the time. Was it a dream, or real live thoughts that still dwelt in his memory? Surely it was when riding the same horse he once had the same impressions, the same reflections had passed through his mind: What a wonderful sensation—a thoroughbred under one—that consciousness of power behind the saddle—that absolute smoothness of action, his forelegs extended right out in front—a nice level feeling on the reins—the glorious rhythm of his paces over the sound, springy turf—the rush of chill air against one's face, as we gallop across a fifty-acre field.

"What shall we do, Dickyboy?" Diana asks, as men and horses disappear in the distance, and after some discussion they decide to work towards home, on the odd chance that hounds may turn their way.

So often the downs look bleak and windswept, but on this still day the spirit of the plains is in repose—no sign of life except a kestrel hovering in the sky. No landmarks save the fringe of Burford Woods, and in the distance the weathercock on Morton Trussell church spire, high above the tree-tops, gleaming in the sunshine.

Taking their bearings from the latter, they drive back on to the road, and after going about a mile turn left-handed, then, hearing the note of hounds away on their left, they pull up and gaze in that direction.

"By Jove, there's the fox!" exclaims Dick, looking towards a clump of trees, and there he is, right enough. The music ceases, and Dick is contemplating whether to holloa or wait a minute.

"Hark, what's that?" Three shrill cries rend the air, and the fox, now just short of the clump, suddenly stops to listen with one pad held up and his muzzle turned round.

Next moment they see, and so does the fugitive, a green woodpecker alight on the nearest tree, whence they can now clearly discern his green back and crimson head as he spirally ascends the sun-speckled bole of a tall beech. It was all a matter of seconds; evidently the fox was mystified at first, but again hearing the cry of hounds on his line, he ambles across the open downs and disappears round the spur of the hill. The two occupants of the cart eagerly watch, expecting every minute to view him across the road in front of them, but he does not reappear.

Soon hounds can be seen skimming over some stout posts and rails, and evidently hunting the same fox, as they are now heading for the clump of trees. One, two, three of the field are over the rails, and Diana instantly recognises her precious Crusader topping the fence, and as they draw nearer X. himself is plainly discernible.

Again hounds and horses are both lost to view in the folds of the ground; apparently they must have checked at the cross roads at the bottom of the hill. There is an angry disappointed ring in the hounds' note, and a minute later Welch's "Whoo, whoop" from the valley below proclaims the fact that Reynard has sought refuge in an eleven-inch drain crossing under the turnpike, where the bitches have marked him to ground.

"By Jove, what luck for Sal! Let's go down and offer her services before the hunt terrier arrives," suggests Dick, and the next moment the tub cart is trundling down the hill to the scene of action.

"We've got a terrier here, Master," shouts Dick, forgetting that he is by way of being an invalid, and jumping out with Sal under one arm.

"Splendid! splendid! We may as well keep the tambourine a-rowlin'," replies Colonel Brian, hoping to get as much sport as he can ere the season closes. Welch holds up hounds, and assisted by both whips, the mouths of the drain on each side of the road are eventually cleared. The indefatigable Fred and Dick are down on their knees in the ditch, and before there is time to say Jack Robinson, little Sal, with hackles up and quivering tail, disappears down the drain. Muffled yaps and subterranean growls confirm the hounds' clue. The fox has now evidently turned, and is facing his antagonist. "Yap! yap! yap!" come back, each yap sounding fainter and fainter as the gallant little Sal assails her foe, driving him back step by step. Just as he reaches the open mouth at the far end of the drain, he whips round and slips away up the hill, pointing for Burford Woods. Out comes Sal, wet and bedraggled, with a scar on her nose, but as proud as Punch with herself, and Dick is only just in time to prevent her from joining in the hunt as hounds come scampering across the road, throwing their tongues as they pick up the line on the grass.

Helter-skelter off the open road on to the open down, following in the wake of hounds, who are close on Reynard's brush, away dash the field, and again Dick and Diana are alone, watching the red coats receding in the distance.

"What a little topper she is, Di! I love her all the more because you gave her to me," exclaims Dick, releasing Sal from his arms.

"Isn't she a pet? Come to mother, and I'll dry you on the rug," she calls out to Sal, who is

whimpering and shaking with excitement, while Dick endeavours to clean some of the mud off his boots on the grass.

"Well, it's no use going back to the wood now, Di."

"No, I'm going to give you some lunch, darling, when I've dried Sal," she replies, rubbing away at the dog's wet coat, "but you may as well jump in and drive while I get out the lunch."

They trot along the white chalk road past a patch of heather and clumps of yellow gorse, into which scuttling rabbits hastily retreat, though not before Sal spots them, then on past old Curlieu's gallops till they reach the Watcombe Vale, where the road is bordered with high, shady hedges.

They were so engrossed in each other, laughing and talking, that long before they realised it they had left behind them the wide expanse of rolling downs that always seem so strangely near the sky, then the broad upland pastures, rich in those grasses so beloved of horses, finally reaching the quiet meadows of the vale, where, during the heat of the day, sun-dappled cattle, leisurely swishing their tails, stood chewing the cud beneath the trees decked in their gay spring foliage. Selecting a wide strip of grass on the edge of the road, Dick pulls up on the lee side of a high blackthorn fence. "Now for lunch," as they are still seven miles from home, and it is long after four o'clock. "It's more like tea-time," says Diana, "but we mustn't waste all this good food, besides it's such fun out here."

The sun is sinking, the trees casting long shadows over the rich green pastures, and the western sky is already assuming an orange hue, while the moon, rising early, peeps through the young leaf of the black-

thorn hedge. Diana has unpacked the hamper, and, looking up, sees Dick's eyes fixed on her. "I must have a kiss before we start," he demands impulsively, jumping up and seating himself on the same side of the cart as her, leaving the opposite seat at the disposal of their chaperon.

"No, you can't here, darling. Anyone may come round that corner. Oh, look at the 'bobbin'!" she exclaims, endeavouring to change the conversation, and throwing a piece of roll to an inquisitive little robin who had just arrived on the scene, and was evidently glad of company. He should have been tending Mrs. Robin on the nest, but he was a bit of a lad, and loved society. Robins often do.

"Oh, Di, nonsense! Sal will keep cave," protests Dick, smiling and putting an arm round her slim waist. Diana cautiously looks up and down the road, then, turning her pretty head towards him, with her smiling red lips very close to his. "I think it's quite safe now, Dickie," she whispers.

Sal was engaged in scratching herself, and the robin was greedily endeavouring to demolish a large crumb, both too much engaged in their own pursuits to take any interest in this happy scene.

Trot, trot—trot, trot. Someone coming down the road towards them, but still out of sight.

"I think I recognise that trot," she exclaims, extricating herself from his arms, just in time to see X. and Crusader jogging round the bend of the road, the red sunset reflected in the horse's eyes.

"It's my other darling!" Then, seeing the look of surprise on Dick's face, she hastens to explain. "The most wonderful horse in the world. Oh, I am so happy!" she murmurs, squeezing his fingers.

Dick refuses to release the small hand in his. "And

I'm going to have the most darling wonderful little wife in the world."

Crusader pulled up of his own accord on recognising his mistress, and the moon peeped slyly over the fence and winked at them.

THE END

Ashford
Grove
Wood
ROAD
Willoughby
Clump